The Wire 469 March 2023

The Wire

Adventures in Sound and Music

The Wire 469 March 2023

Širom
James Brandon Lewis
Aksak Maboul
+ Crammed Discs

Avalanche Kaito
Mark Wastell on The Specials
Debby Friday
Gamut Inc / El Khat
Philip Samartzis
Chris Cutler / PG Six
Negativland

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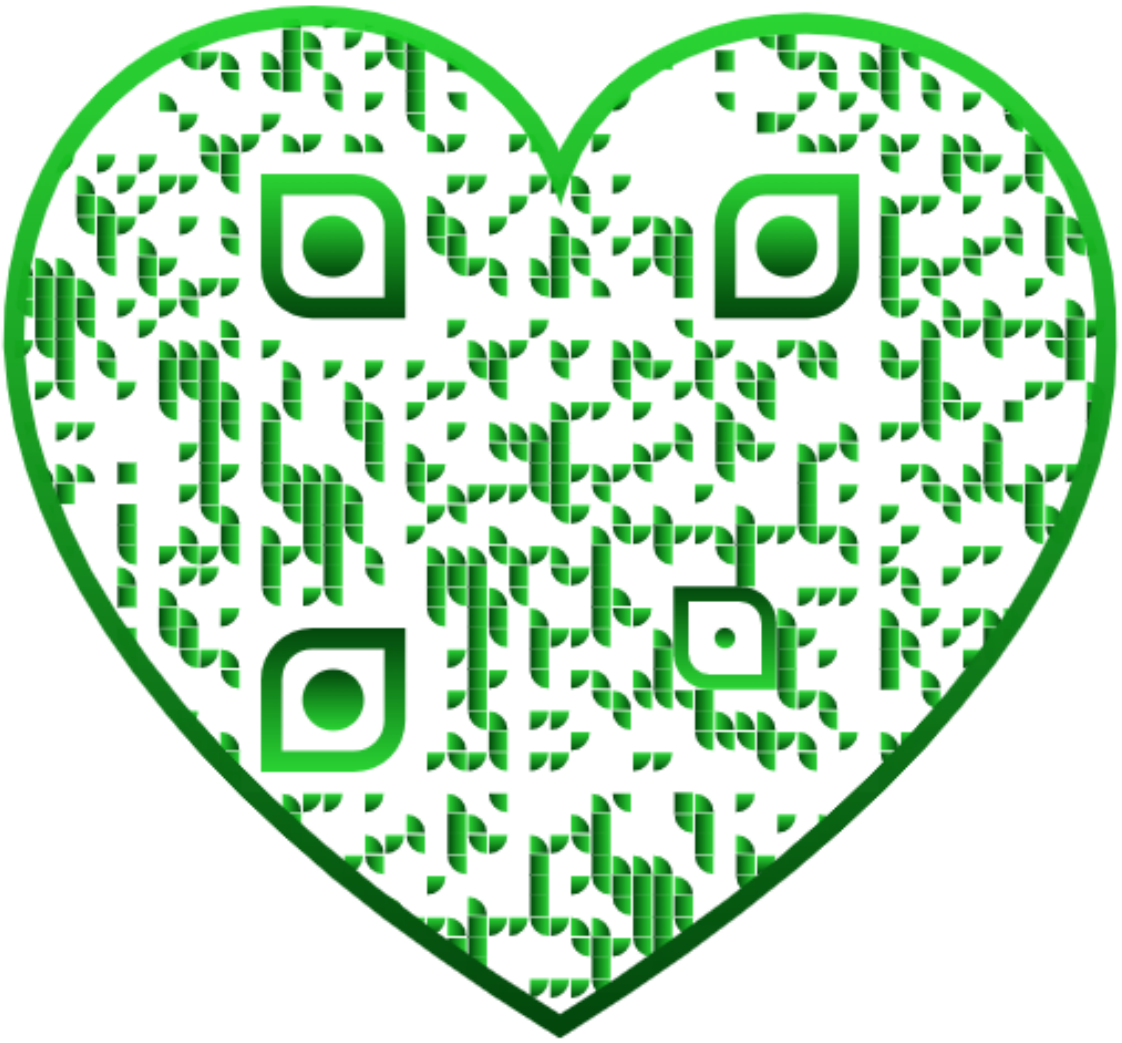
The Necks

A group meeting
+ the solo albums

The Necks / Širom / James Brandon Lewis / Aksak Maboul + Crammed Discs



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Beat Furrer
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Jo David Meyer Lysne
Jostein Stalheim
Ensemble Zwischentöne
BIT20 Ensemble & Jack Sheen
Radio Space

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Cover photography by Lukas Wenninger & Henry Butterworth

The Masthead

If you are a regular reader of *The Wire*, you have probably noticed that the issue of the magazine you hold in your hands (or are browsing online) is somewhat different to the last issue of the magazine you held in your hands (or browsed online). Well spotted. We've had a bit of a makeover. Or rather, we've rolled out the most comprehensive overhaul of the magazine's visual identity in more than two decades.

It all started when we decided to shapeshift the dimensions of the magazine back to A4, a much more ergonomic and economic choice, we thought, than our previous outsize format, especially in these straitened times. Such a shift naturally necessitated something of a rethink when it came to the actual design and layout of the cover and inside pages. Enter *The Wire*'s new art director Guillaume Chuard, a Swiss born London based designer whose Studio Ard had already done significant work redesigning the Tate gallery's *Tate Etc.* magazine.

It has become a tradition at *The Wire* that incoming art directors are given a brief to redesign the title (although in this case it was more like an imperative). *The Wire* is not like other music magazines (or so we like to think), and the first indication to a reader of that is what it looks like. So the redesign brief has always been the same: don't make it look like a music magazine! Keep it stark and simple. No gimmicks, bells or whistles. Let the text and images speak for themselves. Readability and ease of navigation are paramount.

For his his part, Guillaume was more than up to the challenge of devising a new visual aesthetic for a magazine with the status and history of *The Wire*, as we hope this issue demonstrates. As he explains it: "The main approach with the redesign was to embrace the magazine's density, improve functionality and streamline the organisation of content. The new layout is functional yet distinctive, foregrounding the text while leaving enough space for the original photographs we commission for each issue."

For those of you interested in the technical details, the redesign includes a new grid system that actually increases the overall type area; a new font, a version of Unica77 that was customised in collaboration with Swiss type foundry Lineto; a new navigation scheme based on clear visual identities for each section; and a typographic treatment for the headlines which will evolve from issue to issue. Oh yes, and a new logo that finally restores the definitive article to the magazine's masthead.

One other thing you should notice is that the content of the magazine, from features to reviews, remains the same, nothing there has changed, as the presence of The Necks on the cover should underline: this is the fourth time the group have been interviewed in *The Wire*, the first time being all the way back in issue 192, February 2000. After much discussion, we realised the magazine's existing sections and columns provided the best context for our ongoing and unswerving coverage of the multiverse of underground sound and music. So why change them just for the sake of it?

But you will be the judge of that. So please get in touch with us, let us know what you think of this new *Wire*, same as the old *Wire*, only different. We look forward to hearing from you.

Tony Herrington

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June McDoom
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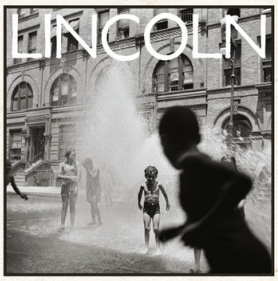
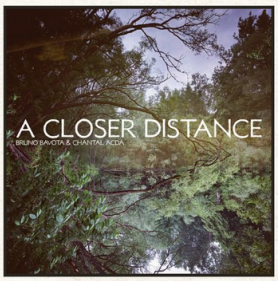
The Real Work
The undefinable sax & drums duo from Australia deliver their fiercest and most diverse album yet. Features guest vocals by **Nick Cave**.



LINCOLN
Repair and Reward
The entire recorded history of one of the foundational pieces of early 1990s post-hardcore is restored and remastered after being unavailable for over 25 years.

MOSS ICON
Lyburnum – Anniversary Edition
The long out-of-print lone album from one of the most influential and innovative hardcore punk ban-ds of all time gets a brilliant reissue with restored artwork.

MONO *My Story, The Buraku Story*
The legendary Japanese instrumental rock band releases their first-ever film soundtrack. A masterwork of delicate, understated execution with oversized emotional resonance.



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Letters

Trivial pursuit
I thought the decision to run the Ocen James article [*The Wire* 468] in spite of the comms frustrations was brilliant. The difficulties told their own open-ended story; it had this derailing effect, robbing the reader of their usual consumption of an artist's carefully considered words. Instead, I was made to ruminate on James's day to day situation, along with – as your writer Daniel Spicer alludes to – the fundamentally different relationship they have with things as trivial as *The Wire*. Inadvertent, I guess, but refreshing/thrilling all the same.
Xavier Boucherat Haverfordwest, UK

Ocen James

Summer breeze
One of my most unexpected and exciting archive discoveries of 2022 was *Distant Saxophones*, an anthology of many years' worth of recordings by British instrumentalists Jan Steele and Janet Sherbourne released on the Portland, Oregon label Community Library. Its spare, airy performances were like little else I had heard, maybe something like Penguin Cafe Orchestra crossed with Brother Ah.

So my mind was blown to read in Print Run in *The Wire* 468 a review of *From Scratch: Albanian Summer Picaresque*, a book about the 1984 LP *Albanian Summer* which had been composed by Dave Smith for Steele and Sherbourne. The album apparently became a slow-burning success as it was copied from cassette to cassette by Albanians living in London. What the hell is this? I have to hear it.

Looking back through your online archive I can see Sherbourne and Steele have been active artists for decades, including in an interesting sounding group called English Gamelan Orchestra. Another new thing to check out. Only in *The Wire*.
Jim Wilson Oxford, UK

Het up
Just to inform you that Het Apollohuis didn't close shop in 1987, as Bill Meyer wrote in his review of the *Duo Geloso* album [Soundcheck, *The Wire* 465], but was open to the public with regular concerts and exhibitions until 1997. 1987 was the year of the second Echo Festival. In that year I became involved with Het Apollohuis, first doing publications for them (the information around the festival, and the book *Interviews With Sound Artists*), later covering their programme extensively for the local newspaper. Because I knew Paul Panhuysen very well, and had met and spoken with Arnold Dreyblatt several times, Dreyblatt had asked me to write the sleevenotes to the *Duo Geloso* album. But perhaps Bill Meyer's 1987 may have been a typo, the 8 being so close to the 9 on the keyboard.
Rene van Peer via email

Master take
How about an article on Rashad Becker, or at least one about the process of mastering as this bloke seems to have mastered everything I've bought for at least the last two years!

Suffice to say that if you've already done something of a similar ilk then please let me know which issue of *The Wire* it's in, as I've obviously missed it!
Simon Aldred via email

The Wire has run two in depth interviews with Rashad Becker, one by Derek Walmsley in issue 353, July 2013, and an Invisible Jukebox in issue 396, February 2017. You can still buy a copy of issue 396 in our online shop, but issue 353 is sold out, though if you have a print or digital subscription to the magazine, you can still read the issue and the article in our online library: see page 104 for details – Ed

Fire music
Cleaning out the basement recently I came across a couple of old issues of *The Wire* saved from my last cellar purge: "100 Records That Set the World on Fire" [issue 175] and "150 Objects of Musical Desire" [issue 150]. Leafing through the former I knew most of the records mentioned but a few jumped out: *The Belle Album* by Al Green, *Desire Develops An Edge* by Kip Hanrahan, and *Exposure* by Robert Fripp – for all the Fripp related music I own (a lot!) I somehow never stopped to smell the roses on this one. Ten minutes on Discogs and one week later, I'm enjoying them all unequivocally, thank you – though it's interesting now to think of music setting the world on fire when it actually seems alight.

A note on design: leafing though these issues some 25 years on I couldn't help note the visual ease of the magazine; if I had to guess there's perhaps twice the content in today's *Wire*. While this surely reflects the culture it perhaps embraces a certain amount of fatigue as inevitable. Less is more? Could be.
Christian Hawkins via email

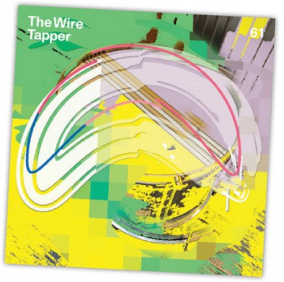
Non-repetitive beats
I was just wondering why the Critical Beats column, that Joe Muggs mostly does, has started dropping in and out of the reviews section semi-recently? I hope it isn't on its way out as it'd be missed. This is a minuscule issue, as the magazine is consistently amazing, and has given me so much joy over the years.
Nigel Baxter via email

Don't worry, Critical Beats is not on the way out: turn to page 62 where you will find Joe Muggs in full effect – Ed

Corrections
Issue 468 In On Location, the review of OORTREDERS spelled Park Yan Lau's name incorrectly.

We welcome letters from readers. Write to us at letters@thewire.co.uk. Letters may be edited

Free with next month's April issue of *The Wire*: *The Wire Tapper 61*



All copies of next month's April issue of *The Wire* will come with a free CD of *The Wire Tapper 61*, the latest album in the magazine's ongoing series of underground music compilations. The album will contain 16 new tracks by Mungo's Hi Fi featuring Lady Ann, Mehmet Aslan & Valentina Magaletti, Max Nagl Trio, Sourdurent, Pas Musique and more. All subscribers to the magazine will also get the album as a download.

The April issue of *The Wire* complete with *The Wire Tapper 61* will be on sale from 9 March. Browse all the albums in the *Wire Tapper* series here: thewire.co.uk/audio/the-wire-tapper. For details of how to subscribe to *The Wire*, see page 104 or go to: thewire. co.uk/subscribe.

Noah Grothe

RARELYALWAYS / WORK

OUT MARCH 10, 2023

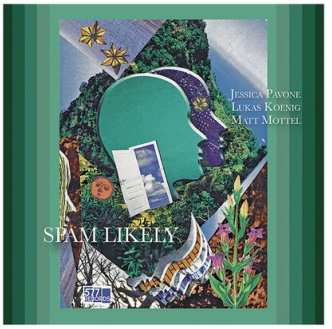
INNOVATIVE LEISURE

Unlimited Editions

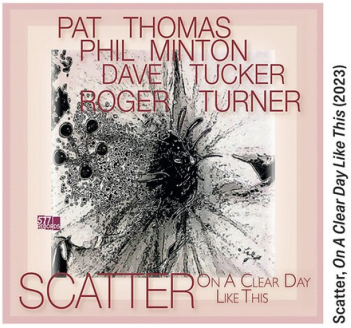
The New York platform exudes principles of community in the improvisation sessions it releases and the family of players who call it home

577 Records

By Kehinde Alonge



Jessica Pavone/Lucas Koenig/Matt Motel, *Spam Likely* (2022)



Scatter, *On A Clear Day Like This* (2023)

Choosing whether to play an album on 577 Records is like considering whether to go to New York's Knitting Factory on a Friday back in the 1990s or early 2000s – the answer is an emphatic yes, as you'll always find a new artist or collaboration that deepens your connection with improvisation, whatever the genre. Whether it's the sounds of veterans of free jazz like Wadada Leo Smith, or the heights reached by newer improvisors like Jessica Ackerley, 577 offers work that has creative music as its central ethos. As drummer and co-founder Federico Ughi puts it, "People are the key to this music, more than a singular genre."

Arriving in New York in 2000, Ughi sought to immerse himself in the vibrant dissonance of NYC's Downtown scene. He recollects how, before getting on the bandstand, he came to venues like the Knitting Factory and Tonic ready to listen. One of the musicians who consistently caught his ear for the way he traversed the domains of jazz, electronic music and experimental rock was Daniel Carter, a mainstay in free jazz who has played with Cecil Taylor, Sun Ra, Sonic Youth, Living Colour and many more. When Ughi got a chance to meet Carter after one of his shows, he regaled him with praises, to which Carter replied in the universal words of affirmation all musicians know well: "Let's play." It began a longstanding relationship that culminated in 577, named after Ughi's Brooklyn apartment address.

The label came together like improvised music – more out of synergistic necessity than careful planning. "Me and Daniel were going to go on tour, and needed a product fast," Ughi recalls. "We didn't want to wait for labels, so we just said, let's start our own label... We didn't have like a big plan, we just started to release our own music. It has been like that ever since."

577 soon grew beyond a holding vessel for Ughi and Carter's music to host the collaborations of many of the musicians they played with in their eclectic community. All of the earnings from album sales went directly to the artists. It is the feeling of community that 577 strives to create, says Ughi. "We much rather someone come to us organically versus some big name that drops from that sky. It seems like it always works better when it comes naturally... a group of friends inviting other friends." A quick peruse through the 577 Records Bandcamp page illustrates its social nature. 2001's *Astonishment* captures the first time Ughi and Carter played together, while on more recent projects like *Radical Invisibility* they are joined by the free strummings of Stelios Mihas on guitar and Irma Nejando (aka Esperanza Spalding) on bass, in what Carter calls a "divinely infectious" embrace.

Whether you listen to the noisy free jazz swells of SSWAN's *Invisibility Is An Unnatural Disaster*, the percussive electronic explorations of Gerald Cleaver's *Griots*, or the many Forward Festival mixtapes (from a festival initially started in 2015 to celebrate Carter's 70th birthday), each project exudes the principle of collaboration and community across sound – a retention of Federico's early wanderings of NYC's Downtown scene. Its 2023 release schedule is already full with releases for the first half of the year from Gerald Cleaver, Alex Ward, Paul Dunmall, Scatter and many more. And with its Sounds Of Freedom music residency, which gathers improvisors from across the globe to develop their skills for a month, the future of 577 Records seems bright, be it for well-established musicians or what Ughi gleefully calls "the underground of the underground". ○

577records.com

Unofficial Channels

Map Pointz

Where were you in 92? To a generation of Angelenos, many of them from Latinx communities, the answer to this question likely comes with fond memories of backyard parties and raves across the sprawl that stretches out from East Los Angeles. Just as rave culture was taking shape in industrial cities and countrysides across the US and Europe, LA had its own vibrant moment populated by teenagers in search of an identity and a good time. Whether dancing, DJing, promoting, or simply allying themselves with others in party crews, these kids cemented a love of rave in the area that continues to be felt today.

Unless you were there in the 1990s, it might be hard to picture just what this timely meeting of dance music, sound system, hiphop and Latinx cultures looked like. Enter the Instagram account Map Pointz: @map_pointz.

Started in the mid-2010s by the artist and educator Guadalupe Rosales, a member of the Aztec Nation party crew, Map Pointz offers a fascinating insight into 1990s LA rave culture via photographs, flyers, magazine articles and video recordings. To browse the page is to fall down a rabbit hole of clothing, hairstyles, flyer fonts, dance moves and DJ selections that evoke shared experiences yet retain their own distinct local peculiarities.

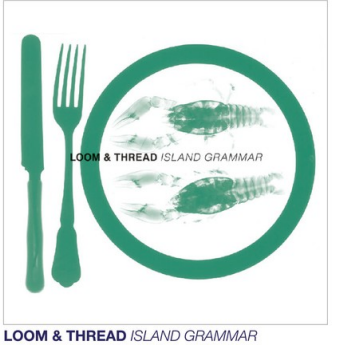
Crucial to the magic of Map Pointz is the choice to not bend the project to Rosales's memories and vision of what it should be, but rather open it to anyone who was there in the form of a "community-generated archive". For her, this approach was necessary to not only challenge the traditional singular framing of history but also celebrate and humanise this shared culture. And by hosting a copy of the archive on social media – where it is most readily visible to its community – it poses a much needed challenge to accepted ideas of accessibility.

As artists die, venues close and music vanishes, it sometimes feels as though modern music history is disappearing as fast as it manifested. It emphasises the need for the type of community driven approaches Map Pointz represents, where archival traditions are challenged just as modern music cultures challenged various aspects of our lives. We don't need to, nor can we, save everything, but in acting as a community we can find new ways to feel ourselves in the archive.

Laurent Fintoni

also available:

ROBOKNOB *IN FROM THE STORM*



LOOM & THREAD *ISLAND GRAMMAR*

KUF *YIELD*

macrorec.bandcamp.com

macro

Debby Friday

Stops along the Toronto based producer's whirlwind tour of stylistic mashups take in industrial club beats and R&B slow jams

Lucky Day

By Claire Biddles
Photography by Isabel Okoro

"I feel like I'm capable of pretty much anything," declares musician, film maker and multimedia artist Debby Friday, with a confidence that is not arrogant but hard won. Born in Nigeria and based in Toronto after stops in a handful of Canadian cities, Friday's debut album *Good Luck* is a contemplative coming of age story encompassing R&B, industrial and club music, all integrated into a whole by a determined auteur. "I'm very curious about the world and people," she asserts. "The way my brain works, there's a hybridity and I see the strings that hold things together."

Friday started out as a DJ in 2017 – a consequence of her love of partying. "I describe myself as an extroverted introvert," she laughs. "I love being around people and I love music. I was around a lot of women who were DJing and I thought, if I'm gonna be at the party I may as well get paid!"

Her star rose quickly, and she toured America and Europe in her first year out. "That was really formative, because I was exposed to all these communities in real life that were very much built on the internet. It was very much the era of SoundCloud, Facebook groups, Tumblr... a global culture of underground electronic music. I came of age in that context."

After touring Europe, Friday quit DJing and began a "four year journey of sobriety and fixing my life". It was formative period in a lot of ways – including cementing her decision to make her own music. She learned to produce via YouTube tutorials and in 2018 she released her first EP, the evocatively titled industrial shockwave *Bitchpunk*. Her DIY determination was inspired by the global underground she was tapped into.

"I discovered people like SOPHIE, Arca, Lsdxoxo, some very interesting ambient stuff, The Buttress and ABRA. It was everything and anything. It showed you didn't need this gigantic machine behind you, propping you up as an artist." However, after releasing her darker, more complex *Death Drive* EP in 2019, she stopped playing live to work on her sobriety. "I put myself in exile, but it was necessary."

This long period of reflection led to *Good Luck*. "I love to work in threes," she says, "so I see it as a cumulative project with *Bitchpunk* and *Death Drive*. I wanted to make something that was about a journey, because I see my life in this narrative sense – I feel like I've been on a kind of hero's journey since 2017."

The album takes in reflections on romance and self-actualisation, peppered with provocative flexes and expressions of layered personas. It also represents a musical expansion from harsh, nocturnal sounds to softer personal expression. "I was more vulnerable and bare for this album," she says, citing the lush sweetness of lead single "So Hard To Tell".

Her performance persona twists and evolves in the seductive standout "Heartbreakerrr", which boasts the melody and sex appeal of *FanMail*-era TLC, and her bravura vocal for rock ballad "Let U Down", which recalls the catharsis of Beyonce's *Lemonade*. "When I'm performing I tap into a part of myself that's very powerful and in your face, much more representative of my personality when I was younger," she says of this shift. "The older I've gotten the more I've been able to soften up a little bit, and that's translating into my music."

This also translates as a contrast between music and voice on "I Got It", which sounds akin to the industrial club tracks of *Bitchpunk*, but with softer vocals, almost whispered with confidentiality in places. "A big thing about the album is the concept of hybridity," she continues. "There's no way to describe it as one genre and I did that purposefully. That's the way I make music, but it's also reflective of the spaces I came from, and the internet age we're in: everything is a hybrid whether we like it or not."

Some tracks sound like floor-fillers with one or two elements swapped out, or missing – complicating any idea of them as dance music. On "Pluto", she isolates a tripping techno beat and juxtaposes it with ethereal electronics – a sparse, enigmatic backdrop for her trap flexes. "What A Man" sounds like a collage of elements from disparate songs: a guitar riff from a sleazy 80s hard rock song, a liquid bassline from a goth dancefloor hit, the electronic beats of an R&B slow jam, and Friday's vocals, which segue from sultry soul lows to reverb-drenched wails. Musically and conceptually, it's close to Yves Tumor's bravura genre mix-ups. It also aligns with the opulent, liberating maximalism of Arca and SOPHIE's moves into more mainstream dance pop – true to the trajectory of Friday's generation of underground electronic music, but utilising her own suite of sounds.

Good Luck is released alongside a short film co-directed with Nathan De Paz Habib, exploring the same themes via a surrealist love story – another example of Friday's commitment to hybridity. For her upcoming live shows Friday will incorporate elements of her audio play *Link Sink*, recently completed for her studies at Simon Fraser University, which she describes as "a cross between an audiobook, a podcast, a movie and an album" with generative art and green-screen filming in the mix. "I don't want to ever feel like I'm hiding behind someone else or someone is speaking for me," she concludes. "I think that's why I've picked up all these skills and I wear all these different hats." ○

Debby Friday's *Good Luck* is released by Sub Pop

What are you doing in May this year? ? – hmmm? you are going to the SPOR FESTIVAL in Århus, Denmark – were Goodiepal's well over 30 years of Art and Music critique as DJ. Audio $vars has been made into a wonderfull and out of this world

Pruttipal Index For:

Futura Resis- tenza

SPOR FESTIVAL FOR CONTEMPORARY MUSIC AND SOUNDART 2025

Examples:

Dj. Audio $var #58

Den veldigt dybe musik der strømmer fra Hessdallen og fylger dig til både Skotland og braziliens-land eg har egentligt skrevet veldigt meget om ufo'er og sådan i et Kristent såvel som nisse perspektiv, men det er ikke mainfestationer af demon'er fra den sidste tid, som eller en af mine ynglings bøger nemlig: "john weldon: UFO's what on earth is happening" ellers menner det.
Min tro læse følgesvnd har i mange år været:
Håkan blomqvist UFO anoterad urvalsbibliografi – bibliotekshögskolan specialarbete
Ht. 1978 : 140 og
Eg arbejder faktisk også på at gjøre dette fantastiske værk en retfærdig efterfølger.
Men du, denne lydfil er dedikeret til min ungdoms livsledsager BeDash der netop forsvant ved Hessdallen for mange år sidan.

Dj. Audio $var #31
Graveyard talk <> Roskilde 2000 <> later> Fonal Records - Catalogue. Nr.? (can't remember sorry)

Dj. Audio $var #32

Ce fichier sonore contient une musique merveilleuse d'accompagnement que j'aurais du utiliser pour quelque chose au lieu de juste la programmer sur un Roland MT-32 et de la jouer en fond ici.

- Quoi qu'il en soit, on a aussi un peu de : Peter Nauer et la fascination pour son travail et la distribution de celui-ci. Cela est suivi par moi parlant de la culture cycliste et des espaces libres.

- Et pour finir, nous avons 3 conversations (conferences?) de mon ancien voisin: Gustaw Metzger que j'aimais tant.

- La dernière partie est un matériau extrêmement important pour moi, et je vais envoyer une grande lettre de remerciement à Kim Grønborg pour des raisons qui deviendront

(Infinite waves - IW28 & emego 211 etc.)

– SEE YOU IN ÅRHUS IN MAY!

Dj. Audio $var #71 -?
Sorry, aber dieser dj. Audio svar ist eigentlich schottischsprachig, oder nicht? Hier sind ich und meine Katze Malo Mleko mit Lesen und Machen von Zungenbrechergedichten beschäftigt, um unsere Geister zu verbinden und gegenseitiges Sprachverständnis einzuüben.
P.S. Bruce McClure & Bjørn Hatleskog haben ein fantastisches Tape auf dem Label: Adaadat (ADA0056) herausgebracht, das Du hören solltest, um Deine Studien dieser spaßmachenden Euro-Disziplin zu vertiefen.
Man sollte immer loslegen und sich zum Narren machen, wenn man spricht, es ist die einzige Weise, die Herzen eines fremden Gebiets zu erobern, glaub' mir oder nicht.

Dj. Audio $var #72 ➡
Besked og Svar til: Den Danske Komponist-forenings medlemmer. – imod systemet siden Jesu fødsel, fed baggrundsmusik & kysse, kysse på Kirkegård!

Dj. Audio $var #73
Malo Mleko and me with negativity and being anti about this and that –but being this as a positive. <> We are also talking ideas of things that change from one state of being into another, without any transformation-time, transition-states there is faster than a blink of an eye, or sound or light or anything, so fast that it dos do not exist! pretty good listening one would say!

Dj. Audio $var #53 ( )
Imaginary-tek and real-tek and how they overlap on the move, Kommunal Klon Komputer 02 breakdown. It is important to move not just you, but also your ideas around the world in various forms, here is my book: El Camino Del Hardcore – Rejsen Til Nordens Indre on board the S.L.Á.T.U.R boat on the way to Denmark after it has been travelling in the possession of: Jeffrey Alan Scudder around the United states of the Americas. Thank you: Áki.

Dj. Audio $var #54
Großer Spaß mit verschiedenen Mikrofonen und Echtzeit-Übersetzungsexperimenten, was verlorengeht, wird in Wahrheit gewonnen, schrecke daher nicht davor zurück, Fehler zu begehen, die Du der modernen Welt zufolge nicht begehen darfst; denn Falsch-Sprechen ist Richtig-Sprechen, und Richtig-Sprechen ist etwas für anglo-programmierte-soziale-Mediencomputer & künstliche Musterkennungs-Intelligenzen – mach den Mund auf, und mache Fehler für die Zukunft des Maschinenlernens!

N.B. Dj. Audio $vars to be found at: github, archive.org, ubuweb & spor festival type: GOODIEPAL

Dj. Audio $var #96
Colchester for: Paris <> Greensleeves for: Ircam via: Editions Mego (3xLP) <> Annual: Pruttipal/ Goodiepal concert for: Stafford Glover. <> Thank you all so much!

Dj. Audio $var #97 ➡
Bisse, Spillemændene osv. er ikke så fede overfor gamle Pruttipal, så lad os lige sætte det hele på pause

The Burkinabe griot and Belgian electronics duo fuse chanted wisdom, talking drums and extended flute techniques into a punk riot

Proverbial Wisdom

By Phil England
Photography by Tom Lyon

Avalanche Kaito: (from left) Kaito Winse, Benjamin Chaval, Nico Gitto

"I didn't feel the risk because I trusted myself," says Kaito Winse, when I ask him about his move from his home in Burkina Faso to Brussels back in 2018, after a visitor played him music from Belgium's underground scene. "Every year I would come and spend three months here and every year the path would deepen. As a modern griot I feel I am accompanied by ancestors and I felt I had this mission to spread the good news."

Soon after his arrival Winse met drummer and producer Benjamin Chaval, and the pair quickly started rehearsing and touring Belgium's circuit of squatted venues. The nucleus of Avalanche Kaito was born. "When we started in 2018 it was very easy," recalls Chaval. "At some point we were just playing free noise, punk, whatever, and Kaito was just, 'Yeah! This I understand.' It was very easy because of the energy and also the rhythms and the timbre – the shape, colour and texture of the sounds with amplifiers and electricity – he was like, 'Yeah, this I know. It's the same as my music.'"

Four years on, the combustable mix of tradition and post-punk energy has developed a decidedly futuristic edge, evidenced on their two widely lauded releases to date for Glitterbeat: the *Dabalomuni* EP and their self-titled debut album. On "Toulele", for example, the drums squelch and squeak with sharp electronic edges, and when the chorus hits, the larger than life detuned bass sound is Earth-shatteringly heavy, acting as a foil to the fiercely proud vocal. In the song's promo video directed by 3D artist Simon Breeveld, a human figure runs for his life through computer-generated landscapes, and then falls endlessly through a sky littered with rock-like objects, before he comes face to face with a majestic ancestor figure whose words are twisted into electronic shards.

The electronic processing is another important facet brought to the group by Chaval, who has worked for some time with the Pure Data visual programming language. When Avalanche Kaito's manager Michael Wolteche discovered this work, Wolteche encouraged Chaval to bring as much of this as possible into Avalanche Kaito. "It was kind of dry and raw, so the idea was to put an electronic, digital dimension, like a landscape behind or above," says Chaval. "I was thinking about a spaceship above Kaito's village. That was the beginning of the aesthetic."

The random and rapidly morphing envelope of sounds that Chaval applies, particularly in the studio but also live, blends with Winse's acoustic equivalents – the latter's extended technique on flute and the harmonic variety he applies with his mouth on his hammered one-string bow. Guitarist Nico Gitto, who joined the group a few years ago, uses a bank of pedals to transmogrify his sound. "I can make it sound like a bass, a keyboard, or landscapes too," he says. "And with a strong rhythmic punch."

Playing a range of instruments, Winse contributes distorted one-string bow riffs (on "Dabalomuni"), astonishing flute (on "Douaga" or "Eya") and talking drum. But central to the whole project are his defiant yet exuberantly life-affirming vocals. His lyrics – sung in Burkina Faso languages – are largely based on the cryptic proverbs that are a common feature of Burkinabe life. "The proverbs come from wisdom – that's the first step," explains Winse. "A proverb is a tool that is given to a person in a specific situation to not get angry, but take the proverb, go, think about the situation and the proverb will help you. So for every situation you can have a proverb that corresponds with it."

Gitto adds: "The proverbs are mostly associated with animals which are supposed to have specific behaviours and characters that you can connect with human personalities, like archetypes." Wolteche: "Sometimes we talk a lot as Europeans in the band, and at some point Kaito tells us, 'You don't have to bomb me with so many words. Give me a proverb and we'll think about it.'"

Things are building nicely for the group. When I speak to them over zoom ahead of their first UK tour, they're in Groningen where they played the previous night, following a radio session for Seattle's KEXP. As the festival season approaches, more dates are starting to come in. Gigs in small, sweaty venues are still fairly frequent, where audiences respond with movement and dance to sometimes extended reworkings of the studio recordings. "Ben and me come from a scene where we make concerts with very energetic music very close to people", says Gitto. "Avalanche Kaito do music to be close to the people, and it's very powerful and with the heart. We do that dance actually."

"For me," concludes Winse, "it works because the people around me have beautiful energy inside. What comes out from the instruments and the machines as emotions opens many doors and makes you feel welcome in the dancing. And when I bring some rhythm or ideas, I listen a lot and I'm welcoming and everyone can explode with the sun inside them." ○

Avalanche Kaito's *Avalanche Kaito* is released by Glitterbeat

DG

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DG

The Berlin duo's robot orchestra is one of many hi-tech experiments testing the boundaries of human perception

Machines of Loving Grace

By Abi Bliss
Photography by Marcus Glahn

"There is always a transcendental idea in technology – it's not only about making it work but thinking about where it will go." remarks Maciej Śledziecki, reflecting upon how the science fiction of centuries past encompassed both intellect and spirit. It's an ethos that drives the uncanny musical robots he builds with Marion Wörle, his partner in Gamut Inc. He continues: "You know [the words for] machine and magic share the same Indo-Germanic root, magh."

"There's a fascination with making a machine work," adds Wörle. "If you are the one who can make it work, this is magic itself."

Only the most hardened sceptic would fail to be enchanted when the usually invisible workings of Arduino, MIDI and SuperCollider animate Gamut Inc inventions such as the Physharmonica, which resembles a modular synthesizer but with the wheezing valves of an accordion, or the BowJo, a banjo where E-bows skate eerie glissandi along the neck. Starting in the late 2000s as a laptop/guitar act – Wörle comes from electronic music, Śledziecki from jazz – the Berlin duo found their focus in an organ music commission for St Peter's Church, Cologne. "I think we were the first ones using a computer to play that organ, and we were so fascinated by it," recalls Śledziecki. "Suddenly, two worlds came together."

Their interest in software-controlled acoustic music was further sparked by meeting instrument builder Gerhard Kern, and the pair graduated from using his contraptions to creating their own. It's a time-consuming enterprise where every element, from magnet to voltage, requires meticulous thought. "What you want changes in the process into something else," Wörle says. "You never know where it leads to, what it will cost, how much time you will need and what it will be in the end," she laughs.

"And then once you're done," adds Śledziecki, "you find out how it should have been done, so then you start again."

The duo's website describes their work as retro-futuristic. "The machines we use are so much connected to the 19th century because they were everywhere," says Śledziecki. "At one point there were more automated pianos sold in the US than normal ones." He embraces revisiting possibilities that were never fully explored. "I think what it allows you to do is to go back in history and imagine the choices, the ways that you could go, and how they might have different consequences."

There's little steampunk whimsy in Gamut Inc's new album *Sum To Infinity*. Automated beaters hammer with tireless precision upon gongs, marimba, vibraphone and scrap metal, while the Physharmonica is joined by a carillon dubbed Specht – German for woodpecker. Soothingly homespun cascading chimes and Heath Robinson-esque rattles contrast with the inhuman precision of Risset rhythms, while waves of incrementally changing tempos evoke perpetual acceleration or deceleration.

"The pieces have this infinite feel and all the psychoacoustic effects are about this," Śledziecki says. They also cite gamelan polyrhythms, Japanese gagaku and Conlon Nancarrow's player piano works "that are somehow human but can only be presented by a machine".

"The human factor is always part of these pieces," asserts Wörle. "It's also about spirituality, especially on the B side: the pieces suddenly open up and are more atmospheric."

The organic-synthetic divide manifests more violently in *RUR* (*Rossum's Universal Robots*), last year's operatic adaptation (with librettist Frank Witzel) of Karel Čapek's 1920 play of the same title. Set on an island where androids gain souls and then revolt, the play's chief cultural legacy was establishing the word robot in modern usage. "It's a bit trashy, but we loved it," says Śledziecki. Yet the pair are unswayed by the prospect of their own mechanical workers gaining greater creative autonomy through machine learning, explaining that although current research interests them, they don't feel they have sufficient expertise to dabble. Nevertheless, they employed the AI text generator GPT-3 for *Over The Edge Club*, a music theatre work in which a future superintelligence dreams about older, obsolete AIs. Wörle's fascination "that it worked so very well, and so fast" is tempered by Śledziecki's observation that it eventually "somehow becomes like the uncle at your table who just keeps on babbling".

In any case, the prospect of using SuperCollider to fire lightning speed MIDI through organ pipes is compelling enough, coaxing effects such as dynamic fades, alternative tunings or distortion from the instrument's architecture. And the world has caught up: this November brings the third edition of their AGGREGATE festival of automated organ, featuring new commissions from a host of likeminded artists. Before then, *ZEROTH LAW* will form the final part in Gamut Inc's trilogy themed around the ever-evolving human-technology balance. Created for Ghent's Logos Foundation, the world's largest orchestra of robotic instruments, it also satisfies the pair's desire to work with organic voices again, even if its complex layering and pulse-width modulations challenge the abilities of human larynxes. "We used the composition techniques that we developed for the machines on the choir," Śledziecki reveals. "Which is sometimes irritating for the singers, but they had enough fun with the last project that they will come back." ○

Gamut Inc's *Sum To Infinity* is released by Morphine. *RUR* is showing at Berlin's Theater im Delphi from 16–18 March

Gamut Inc's Maciej Śledziecki (left) and Marion Wörle

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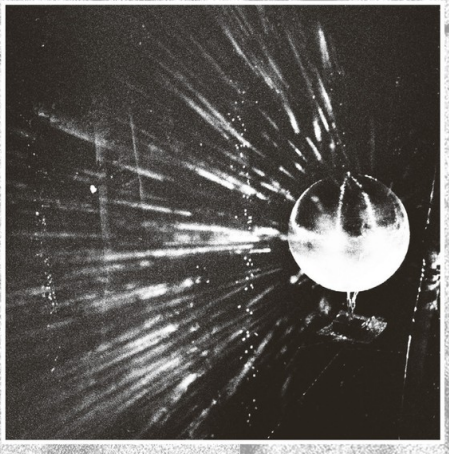

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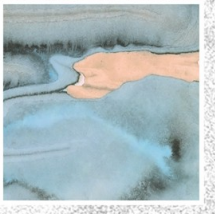

Matthias Puech
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LP | DL
"...A Geography Of Absence is a monumental journey and appears to be the composer's attempt at processing grief via the discovery (or creation) of new sonic worlds."
THE WIRE (UK)

Eyal El Wahab's group conjure the lo-fi glory of 1960s and 70s Yemeni singers on improvised junkyard instruments

Rough Riders

By Clive Bell

"*Like a saint of no religion/I wish I was that kind of person/On the water/Of the sea and the river/She walked on water*".

If El Khat was a car, it would be a rattling farm cart careering down any road, no matter how rough, propelled by a noisy, home built engine. El Khat are a Yemeni group based in Tel Aviv, Israel, with an evolving cast of members led by the charismatic Yemeni Jew Eyal El Wahab. The video of the above song "Ala Al Ma" shows a pair of drummers flanked by guitar, keyboard and trumpet, and El Wahab bowing a three-string fiddle constructed from a junkyard tin can.

I heard El Wahab was previously a carpenter, but he denies it. "You call me a carpenter, which is a really high title – I'm not!" he insists. "I just do experiments, but I'm injured every time I try something. Then you appreciate it more."

He's also keen to play down his career as an orchestral cellist – after playing cello for less than a year, he somehow finagled his way into the ranks of The Jerusalem Andalusian Orchestra. "I was testing my limits to be sure," he laughs. "I had an opportunity to join a symphonic orchestra, and the conductor didn't know that I couldn't really read music. He said he liked my sound, which I find funny because after one year playing cello you don't sound nice. You know how in an orchestra all the bows are in sync with each other, the downbows and the upbows. If you see the film of that concert, there's only one person who doesn't have his bow synced with the others – you'll spot me!"

Around 2017, when El Wahab was stuck in a musical cul de sac, a friend gave him a copy of *Qat, Coffee & Qambus: Raw 45s From Yemen*, a compilation from the 1960s and 70s by UK DJ and record collector Chris Menist. He was immediately inspired: "In Yemeni music you have different styles of course; it has to do with religion, and if you are rich you're making different music from if you are poor. So this album was pretty thin in sound and I liked it a lot. Roughness has to do with imperfection, and we are not perfect, so this is great, to just accept it and be happy about it."

El Khat's second album *Albat Alawi Op 99* was released last year by Glitterbeat. Let's unpack that title: Faisal Alawi was a giant among Yemeni singers, who passed away in 2010. "He looks very much like my grandfather," says El Wahab, "so there's an emotional attachment for me. In the West they don't hear about these places, and this music, they stay under the radar. I wanted to give a little more attention to Yemeni music from those days. The sound is not fancy, not rich, but it's unique and it touches your heart."

Then albat is a cheap box, or even the pink plastic water containers that El Wahab repurposes as his dirty cellos. "Albat is like a box or a can of tuna you might find on the street," he expands. "But you can also make music using those boxes, either drumming on them or putting a string on them. Music out of poverty." El Khat shows respect to a popular singer like Alawi – why shouldn't he have an *Opus 99* like Sergei Prokofiev?

This month El Khat visit the UK for the first time to play five dates. This will warm them up for a score of performances across Europe this spring. The current band members are pretty much all from the Yemeni diaspora – Yemen itself has spent much of the last decade wracked by civil war, so communication with musicians there is very difficult. "Our line-up has changed a couple of times," explains El Wahab, "so now we have only friends of Yemeni origin. Here in Israel you have a big Yemeni community that came in the 50s, some before, some later. Now many Yemenis escaped from Yemen to Europe – the situation is very difficult. I'm studying the Yemeni language with one man, and now he went back to [Yemeni capital] Sanaa from Egypt."

The group name refers to the chewing of khat leaves, an everyday means of communal chilling out for many Yemenis. The UK writer and historian Tim Mackintosh-Smith has memorable descriptions of khat sessions in his book about Sanaa, where he has lived for many years. Poetry is exchanged as the hours pass. El Wahab confirms that the tradition lives on. "I would say it got slightly modernised," he adds. "These days you also have live playing of instruments, but the tradition stays. And it's not only Yemenis, but also Ethiopians, Somalis and people from Djibouti. I like the contrast – that it could be destructive, but at the same time it's uplifting. And the leaves are natural, they don't touch it, they don't make powder out of it," he laughs. "That feels like a statement to me – I'm not sure what the statement is!" ○

El Khat tour the UK this month: see Out There

El Khat: (from left) Lotan Yaish, Eyal El Wahab, Yefet Hassan

Hila Ahwal

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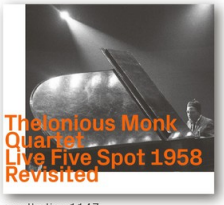

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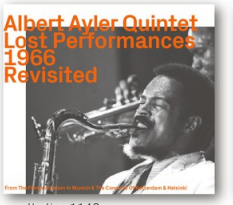

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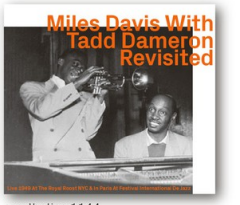

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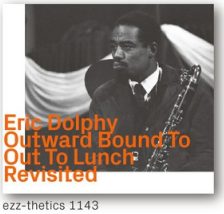

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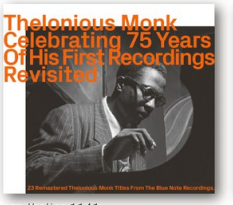

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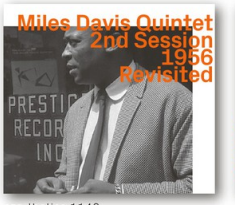

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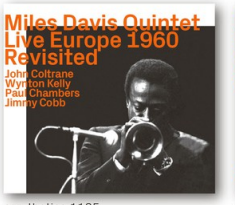

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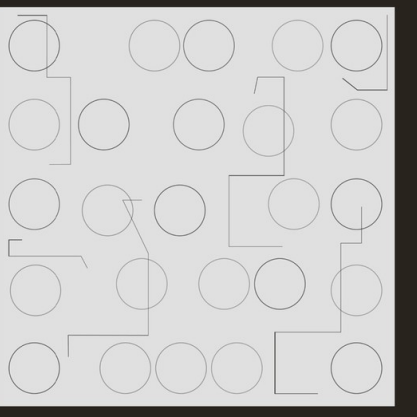

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The declining number of venues and record shops in the Greek capital has led to a proliferation of underground tape and digital microlabels

Athens

By Ioannis Kotsonis

December 2022 marked the end of Phase! Records, one of the more consistent labels active in the loose network of weirdos and noiseniks in the more obscure side of the Greek underground. The occasion was marked by a final event at Temple Athens, a large venue which often hosts rock gigs and techno parties.

Phase! was a one-person operation, like many such endeavours, releasing many projects by the man himself, Panagiotis Spoulos, such as his guitar-driven solo project Dead Gum, deconstructed noise rock duo Reverse Mouth and sleazy no wave/post-punk outfit Sclavos. The Phase! catalogue carries traces of the underground scene of the past 20 years, including CD-R releases by Adam_is (aka Michael Adamis). A constant presence in the local scene, Adamis's live performances, usually in unofficial makeshift venues such as squats or even the terrace of his own small studio, combine elaborate scenography, props, costumes and video collages to create intimate colourful extravaganzas full of absurd humour, with pop culture references underlined by a pervasive actionist sensibility.

The mix of DIY attitude, limited means and gonzo experimentation has characterised a lot of happenings in the Greek experimental underground since the early 2000s. Small labels like the now defunct Absurd and its numerous sublabels run by Nicolas Malevitsis, and Antifrost, run by Dimitris Kariofilis better known as ILIOS, showed the idiosyncratic visions of their respective owners and acted as nodes in a loose network of underground artists inside and outside of Greece, often connecting with venues and record shops.

Several shifts in Athens since 2013. Many venues dedicated to experimental music and specialist record shops shut down. Electronic dance music gained huge momentum in large and medium-sized venues. Cultural institutes such as Onassis Stegi became increasingly involved in promoting and showcasing experimental underground acts as part of high-profile international festivals such as Borderline and Tectonics. Meanwhile, some activity shifted to a slightly more esoteric mode of production and distribution. A few small labels have become increasingly active internationally, as part of a more persistently DIY, lo-fi and analogue underground. Tape is the preferred medium, and Bandcamp the platform of choice.

"Cassette tape is the easiest and cheapest physical format," says Savvas Metaxas of Dasa Tapes and Granny Records. "I know that most people don't own a tape deck and will just listen to the digital files but still I want to have a physical format to hold in my hands."

Dasa Tapes releases cover a lot of ground, ranging from the electroacoustic compositions of Marco Ferrazza and the hypnotic minimalism of Ben Vida's *Rhythm Fields*, to the odd acoustics summoned by Elena Kakaliagou's french horn, and the languorous melodies of Lori Goldston and Stefan Christoff . "From the beginning we decided that Dasa will be open to all different kinds of experimental music, not excluding things that are more melodic or rhythmical," says Metaxas of the philosophy he shares with co-runner Danai Giannakopoulou. It's a contrast with Granny Records' more specific activities. Metaxas, Vasilis Liolios and Spiros Emmanouilidis showcase their own musical explorations alongside handpicked representatives of contemporary electroacoustics (Fabio Perleta's subtle airy compositions, Atte Elias Kantonen's detailed micro electronics, etc).

Coherent States also has a specific focus, but a deliberately messier one. "For me the criterion is to release music that I would rush to buy and would want to listen to immediately," says label co-runner Manolis Pappas, "something that happens to me with certain labels like Chocolate Monk and Fragment Factory." Pappas and Yannis Kontandreopoulos, whose next release is an album by The New Blockaders, talk about how they consider Coherent States a platform where music from abroad will be introduced to the tiny Greek scene, and vice versa. There's an emphasis on lo-fi experimentation and artists who work with cracked media. "Noise is one of the many elements that we are interested in, improvisation is another. Mostly though we are interested in things that feel deconstructed and between genres." These unstable elements in the in-between spaces can be heard in Gaël Segalen's *Sofia Says*, which tiptoes between precise electroacoustic composition and abstract noise experiments, and a creaking acoustic duet between Danae Stefanou's piano and Michalis Moschoutis's acoustic guitar.

Also part of this milieu are More Mars and Thalmos. The former has a focus on lo-fi concrete manipulations and abrasive electroacoustics, and the latter, run by sound artists Panos Alexiadis and Kostas Kefalianos, presents their work alongside international figures like Francisco Meirino, Stephen Cornford and Aki Onda. Orila supports many mainstays of the local scene including Angelos kyriou, whose mixture of songwriter pop with plunderphonics and electronics remains one of the most refreshing sounds to come out of Athens.

Rekem boasts deep connections to labels from past decades and is responsible for the idiosyncratic work of Panos Charalambous and Dimosioypallilikо Retire, as well as the electracoustic explorations of Kostis Kilymis and Leif Elggren. Finally, Untitled-1 showcases some of the more lopsided dance music from Athens including Turbo Teeth, a combination of intense acid infected beats feedbacking electronics and metallic percussion.

All these labels put a great deal of care into the artwork and design of each release. In an environment with a tiny community and non-existent institutional support, the history of these microlabels is one thread of underground music in Athens that is full of surprises. ○

Savvas Metaxas performing at Stavros Niarchos Cultural Center, Athens

Ioannis Kotsonis is a sound artist and musician based in Athens

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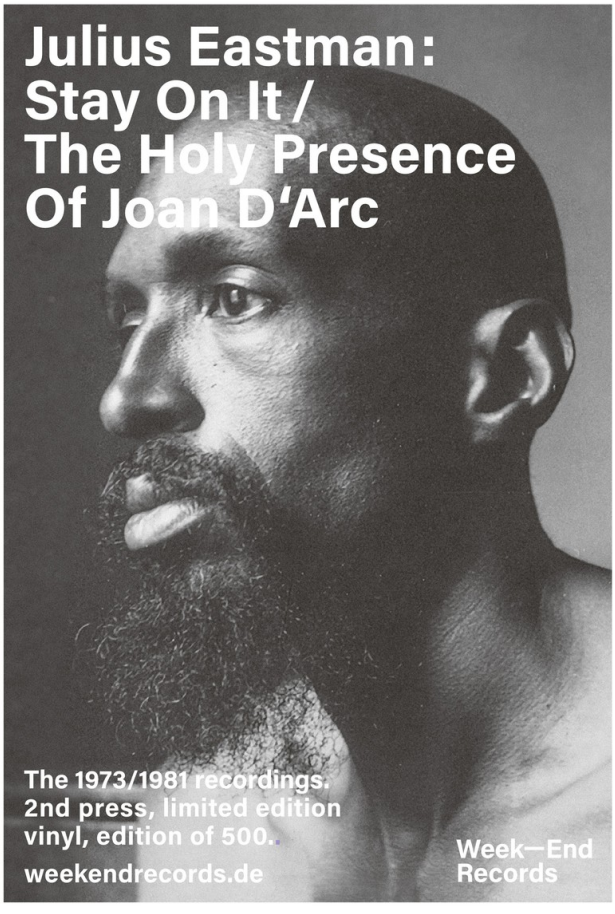

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This month's artwork selected by Mark Wastell
Album cover by Chalkie Davies & Carol Starr

The Specials
The Specials
2 Tone 1979

Memory dictates that this was the first album I ever purchased. October 1979. I was 11 years old, the perfect age to be swept up by the 2 Tone movement. "Gangsters" had already been a hit and here I was, ready and all fired up for the debut album from The Specials. Their appearance on *Top Of The Pops* in August 1979 had been a pivotal, mind-spinning moment in my young life. Much like the majority of pre-teen UK, I'd never heard of ska or rude boys or even Coventry, but we certainly received a thorough education in a few short weeks that autumn. I was all in. The Specials, along with other 2 Tone acts, ignited something within me.

Buying albums wasn't a casual task in those days. You had to put some effort in. For me, it meant a two hour round trip by bus to Colchester, my nearest town, quite an undertaking for an 11 year old. The town had loads of record shops, and I guess I would have bought this album at Andy's or Parrot Records. Safely secured, I couriered it home. Mission accomplished. I couldn't wait to hear the music and, of equal importance, study the cover.

I say study but really I mean scrutinise. I was all over it with a magnifying glass, absorbing every detail and nuance. I needed to take as much as possible from those glorious front and back photographs shot by Chalkie Davies.

Things were changing rapidly in my little world. My collar length hair was soon for the chop. Look at Terry and Jerry's – suedeheads? Were they? I wasn't sure, as this was another new term I was getting to grips with. Trousers, short in length and narrow in width. Three button jackets. Jerry's fringed, tasseled loafers. Horace Panter and Terry Hall's brogues. John Bradbury's derby boots. Neville Staple sporting a dapper trilby and some of the others in pork pie hats. Five of them neatly done up at the neck with skinny ties. This was all new to me but I had to follow their lead. Button down shirts. Thin lapels. White socks. Lynval Golding's wraparound sunglasses. These guys had put real effort into this look and man, I wanted some of the same. But... was Terry wearing black eyeliner? Maybe that was a step too far? And I was always a little suspicious of Roddy Radiation's quiff but decided it was a minor misdemeanour in an otherwise perfect visual treat.

It took a short while to piece the ensemble together. First phase, hair buzz cut, number four. Button down shirt and white socks were easy to procure, even in Colchester. I raided my dad's wardrobe for a thin tie he still had from the 1960s. Black brogues came soon after. Light blue sta-press trousers followed. Even a junior size pork pie hat. The transformation was swift and complete. My nan was a little concerned about the hair, though, worried it was going to spoil an upcoming family wedding.

And the music? Well, you know all about that, as you probably wouldn't have read this far if not. To my young self it was as terrifying as it was electric, speaking of a grown up world of which I had had no experience, a mercurial portrait of violent crime, racism, teenage marriage, pregnancy, court appearances, attempted suicide, inner city strife and social inadequacy in Maggie Thatcher's broken, fractured Britain.

Almost 44 years have passed since the release of that album. There may have been a few variations along the way but I still dress to the sartorial blueprint as laid before me all those years ago. I've even got the same haircut. RIP Terry Hall. ○

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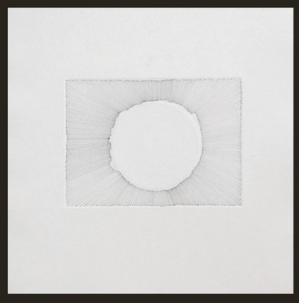

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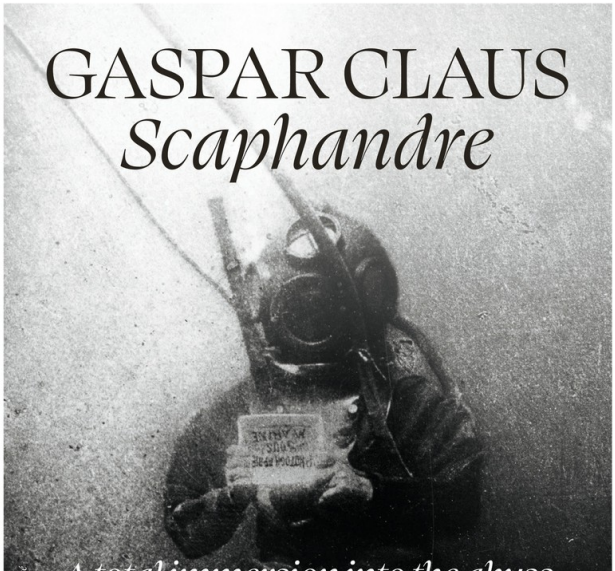

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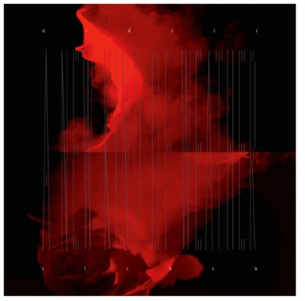

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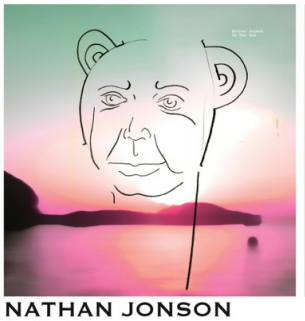

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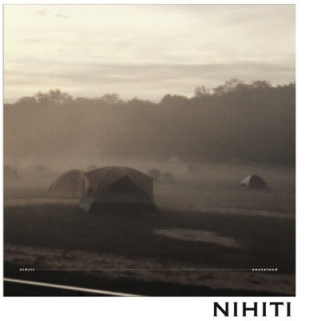

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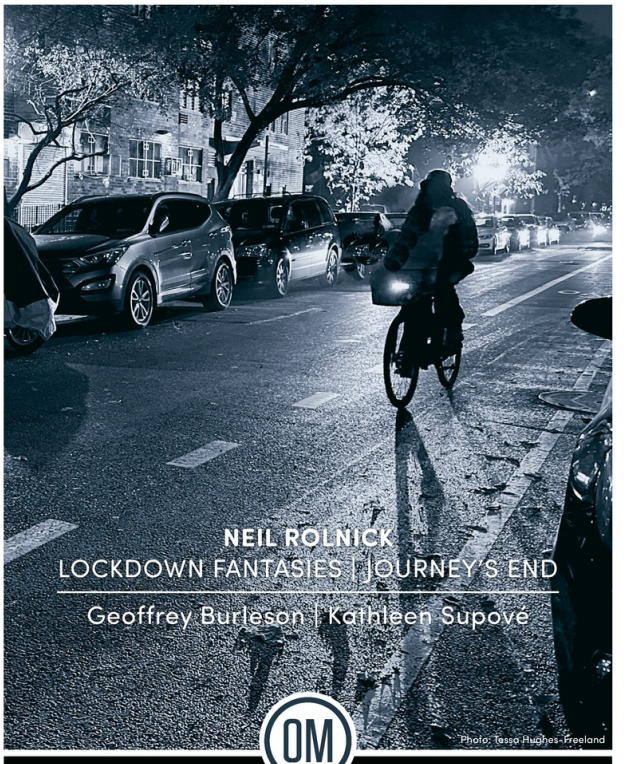

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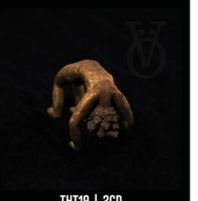

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Invisible Jukebox

Each month we play an artist or group a series of records which they are asked to comment on – with no prior knowledge of what they are about to hear. This month it's the turn of James Brandon Lewis

Tested by Brad Cohan
Photography by Amina Gingold

James Brandon Lewis in New York, January 2023

James Brandon Lewis

Like the late, great David S Ware, saxophonist James Brandon Lewis has a distinct tone, with caterwauling blasts and soul-searching cries, that has quickly become instantly recognisable in the US East Coast music scene, The figures he has studied with and those he calls his mentors read like a who's who of the avant garde free music field: Wadada Leo Smith, Henry Threadgill, William Parker and Matthew Shipp, among others.

Raised in Buffalo, New York, he studied at Howard University in Washington, DC, and it was at California Institute of the Arts where the fledgling composer and improvisor found his purpose under the likes of Smith and the late Charlie Haden. Lewis credits Smith, James Newton and Matthew Shipp as catalysts who encouraged a move to New York in 2012. Since his relocation, Lewis has settled in as a protagonist of the city's vibrant creative music scene. He's meanwhile forged alliances in Europe with the prolific British rhythm section of John Edwards and Mark Sanders, and the venerable Swiss label Intakt.

His output as bandleader and collaborator is varied and uncompromising. *Radiant Imprints* (a 2018 duo with drummer Chad Taylor), *Unruly Manifesto* (2019) and his quartet's *Molecular* (2020) put Lewis on the map, and 2021's *Jesup Wagon* with Red Lily Quintet (with Parker, Taylor, cornettist Kirk Knuffke and cellist Christopher Hoffman), a sprawling ode to African-American polymath George Washington Carver, cemented his place in the pantheon of Black creative music. Lewis has meanwhile explored spoken word with poet Anne Waldman and the group Heroes Are Gang Leaders.

His newest project is equally ambitious. *I Of Eye* is a trio with the unusual line-up of sax, cello and drums alongside Hoffman and percussionist Max Jaffe, released on the ANTI– label. Reportedly recorded without chord symbols or harmonic guidance on the charts, it draws from both post-bop tradition and punk rock intensity, featuring collaborations with Washington, DC's The Messthetics alongside a cover of soul legend Donny Hathaway.

The jukebox took place in New York.

Wadada Leo Smith
"Lake Michigan"
From *The Great Lakes Suites* (TUM) 2014

JBL Can you turn it up? Is that Wadada? And Marion Brown? Roscoe [Mitchell]?

BC **It's a piece from *The Great Lakes Suites*.**

JBL Ah, OK. That's Henry [Threadgill]. That's Jack DeJohnette. I was at that recording session [laughs]. That was pretty cool.

BC **How did you happen upon that session?**

JBL I studied with Wadada and we keep in touch. It's not as frequent as we used to but I know his sound for sure. That's a little foolery because at first I was, like: don't go with your first instinct. Just listen a little bit, in reference to the instrumentation of the recording and making sure that it was another sax-trumpet combination, ie Ornette Coleman and Don Cherry. Wadada's got a sizzle... on his sound. That was cool – I got to meet Jack DeJohnette, too. And John Lindberg. I worked with him when I was at CalArts. [bassist] John Lindberg was there because Wadada was on sabbatical. I got to work with him for a semester then the other semester I got to work with [Art Ensemble Of Chicago's] Famoudou Don Moye.

BC **What did you take away from the teachings of Wadada Leo Smith?**

JBL We talked about a variety of things. Sometimes it would be music related, either theory, or the business of getting your music out there, setting up your own venue space or working a job to fund your own projects. Then other times, we'd talk about basically obliterating any norms that I had about music. When I went to CalArts, in one of our first lessons, Wadada says to me, "James, how many intervals are there?" I said 12, and he said, 'You should look at the panel again. There's more than 12.' One semester we might go over Billie Holiday, we'd watch documentaries, we'd go over her music. Then the next couple of weeks, we're studying Michael Jackson and what he wore, the purpose of his singing where it sounds like it's mumbling but that's on purpose to get you to really listen to the music. We'd listen to [Thelonious] Monk and he'd have us find a unique moment in the music, something that's happening only once that doesn't happen anywhere else in the piece. That gave me different compositional ideas as I began to compose more on my own. I still call him and he's vital in me being able to survive in this town. He's one of the people who told me to move to New York – Wadada, James Newton and Matthew Shipp: 'You should leave and go to New York. I think you would find more of what you're looking for creatively.'

BC **As far as learning and teaching in the context of jazz, what does that mean to you?**

JBL To me I always walked away with feeling like Wadada was and is... an artist, meaning that it was less about tunes for tunes' sake and more about ways of thinking, philosophical ways of thinking about music, the idea that a composition should be a problem you're trying to solve [laughs] which is one of the statements he used to say. I've been studying music since I was nine and he would bring questions to the table that, at that point in my life, no one had ever fostered those kinds of questions, like, if you really want to get to the root of yourself, you should go for a walk and then map your experiences, map that feeling of going and being in nature. That experience, talking about ways of being that have to do with a very introspective approach, is completely different from, and this is no knock, 'Go in a room and practise your major skills in all keys.' Henry Threadgill, who's on that recording, I have, in recent years, sparked up a mentorship/friendship with. He's another one of these people that got me to think about sound from a film or a visual art perspective, with a foreground, a middle ground, a background. Kind of blew me away. It was a different change of pace for me.

Charles Gayle
"In The Name Of The Father"
From *Look Up* (ESP-Disk') 2012

JBL [Laughing] Is this early William Hooker?

BC **This is Charles Gayle.**

JBL This is Charles Gayle?! Oh, my goodness. The voice sounds like William Hooker a little bit. This is amazing. What year is this?

BC **It's a live set from 1994 that ESP-Disk' issued in 2012. It has Michael Bisio on double bass and Michael Wimberly on drums.**

JBL Oh, wow. This is interesting, man. I know William Hooker. He does poetry too [listens intensely to the words].

BC **When did you first cross paths with Gayle?**

JBL I moved from Buffalo when I was 19 so I didn't know about him [there]. When I moved to New York, I met him at William Parker's house and we hit it off immediately because it was just Buffalo vibes. Same thing with Juini Booth. When you find somebody from Buffalo, you know how hard it is to move from there and even get recognised. To discover a whole movement, in my early twenties that existed in Buffalo at University of Buffalo, learning about Charles Gayle having taught courses there on music, it was like, wow, man. This guy's legacy is in the trenches.

BC **Do you have a favourite record of his?**

JBL One of my favorites is [2012's] *Streets*. Everyone loves that record. I guess I'm one of the everyone! One of the bands I wish I could have heard, and having talked with William Parker, is when him and Charles and Rashied Ali had their band. Now that's a band I wish I heard live.

BC **You seemed to have been taking in what Charles Gayle is sermonising in that track.**

JBL I think what he was saying really resonates with me and it's often something that I encounter – the topics that he's covering is something that I often ponder in my own way.

BC **You seem to explore spiritual and religious themes, but in your own approach, not as direct as Gayle's on that tune.**

JBL Definitely not as direct, but over the years I have embraced having my actual voice on recordings saying a few words here and there, because I think after a while the listener wants to know. It's like when a Miles Davis recording or a John Coltrane recording is released and all of a sudden the outtakes have their voice and everyone's like, wow! They get to hear the artist behind the instrument.

I was thinking about what Charles Gayle was saying [in the track] about finding truth and searching for the truth... *"Don't talk about John Coltrane"* if you don't know XYZ. I often think about the legacy of, for instance, gospel music. It's interesting that when we talk about,

this poem, about avant garde music, or about Albert Ayler or Charles Gayle, we don't first examine Thomas Dorsey, Mahalia Jackson, James Cleveland or Albertina Walker. Where do these songs come from? Albert just started playing them? No, that's not the experience.

My dad is a minister, part of the Baptist tradition, so I'm always in conversation with that in a way that makes the audience curious, like the idea of "Send Seraphic Beings" (from *Eye Of I*) is not a random title. To have titles that point to similar concepts but not using the same wording as everything but it's still a part of history, ie John Coltrane's "Seraphic Light". These things still being a part of tradition but very much being myself.

Vijay Iyer & Mike Ladd
"The Color Of My Circumference I"
From *In What Language* (Pi Recordings) 2003

JBL This is the 2000s, right? Is that Vijay on the piano?

BC **Yep. Have you played with him?**

JBL Once, yeah. I've listened to enough music to know Vijay.

BC **What is your process of matching words to music? Do you try to match one flow to another in a controlled way, or is it open?**

JBL I have been involved with poetry for a while. Just recently I've collaborated with Anne Waldman. I have my own poetry band, Heroes Are Gang Leaders. For the last... I don't want to say ten years, I've been dibbling and dabbling. I opened up for Amiri Baraka at St Mark's Church [in Manhattan]. When I'm collaborating with poets, reading the texts, it's just as important picking my spots where there's a line break, knowing when to play and when not to play, just like if I was accompanying a vocalist. That pairing [in the recording] was perfect because Vijay is being very rhythmic. It's the same pattern over and over, he's varying it but not too much to throw off the poet because they need a consistent thing under that. Anne Waldman, she doesn't care what I do.

As far as my own writing, I don't consider myself a poet. If I pick a title, sometimes the title gives me a direction that the poem could go, or vice versa. In the inside of the new record [*Eye Of I*], I wrote a short poem that uses the titles. Oddly enough I met Thurston Moore at the Naropa University in Colorado, the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics in 2015–16. He was teaching poetry and I was like, I know Sonic Youth. Is this the same guy? Because you don't make those associations.

BC **You and Thurston teamed up?**

JBL Yeah and that's where I met Lydia Lunch and Fred Moten and lot of people at that time. Fred was actually a guest lecturer and he had his own class. It was the whole summer.

BC **As far as fusing poetry into your music, are there comparisons between the improvisatory context of one form and the other?**

JBL There definitely is, but just like with words they have their own camps. It's the written word versus the spoken word: which version of this is the true poet? It's like the idea of music and those who can improvise and those who can't, classical, legit music, jazz... you're just making stuff up and then there's subcategories of: can you play chord changes or are you a free musician and you're just playing anything? It's interesting, these worlds all overlap and they all influence each other. I meet poets all the time who I wouldn't say they feel comfortable improvising. Anne Waldman feels comfortable improvising.

There's this notion that when someone's freestyling, they know what they're going to do – I think that's a misnomer. In order to abstract something, you have to know from whence it came, so I think that when someone's freestyling, they've already been in the gym with words. They already know how to deliver what they're going to deliver. The same with so-called free or avant garde musicians. They've already been in the gym – they don't need to show you that they've been in the gym.

Black Eyes
"Eternal Life"
From *Cough* (Dischord) 2004

JBL Is this (from) the 1980s?

BC **No. Early to mid-2000s.**

JBL Wow. That's really lo-fi, too. Early 2000's? Alright, who is this?

BC **This is Black Eyes, who were from Washington, DC and on Dischord Records. I wanted to throw something at you from the hardcore scene because you collaborate with The Messthetics, who feature Brendan Canty and Joe Lally of Fugazi, on *Eye Of I*.**

JBL Who's that on sax? Do you know?

BC **It's one of Black Eyes, Jacob Long.**

JBL I met Anthony Pirog [of The Messthetics] at a William Hooker recording session around 2014, and for the last few years, I've collaborated with The Messthetics. In recent years, having collaborated with different people associated with The Lounge Lizards, working with Marc Ribot, a friendship with Thurston Moore, I've been more attuned to checking out other things. Anthony's an amazing guitarist and there's a lot of overlap there with records we're into, like Sonny Sharrock's *Ask The Ages*. To me, Brendan and Joe just added to my own narrative of energy – chasin' energy. 'Let's play this music like there's no tomorrow,' they can relate to that. The Messthetics are beautiful. And talk about that label Dischord. Really just sticking to their guns, not getting caught up with the whole muck of how the industry can be and supporting people in that area. There's something to be said for holding your ground.

BC **Pirog is from a jazz background but Canty and Lally were born and bred on the punk and hardcore scenes. They can definitely groove. Do you get a jazz vibe from them as a rhythm section?**

JBL They can definitely groove. I'm going into the experience with no expectations other than we're going to make music that speaks to the four of us making music together and not any hierarchies of what they should be playing or what is expected. It's like what we were saying earlier about Thurston: we might still be in a Sonic Youth phase of our lives, and he's now teaching poetry, whereas Brendan and Joe, they're in their mid-fifties, life is moving on. They all write some really good tunes, they're all lyrical. I don't care what genre you're talking about, if it's a strong melody, it's a strong melody.

John Edwards/Mark Sanders/John Wall
"J/M/J (Set1)"
From *Live At Cafe Oto 2* (No label) 2020

JBL Hmmm. OK. What's the group's name?

BC **The percussion/drums and double bass combo are two musicians you've played with, actually: John Edwards and Mark Sanders...**

JBL What?! That's them? Wow, I could not tell at all!

BC **...with John Wall on laptop.**

JBL That's interesting. Ya gotta throw a little wrench in there. The amount of space they're playing with makes it hard for me to recognise that is them, which has me thinking about going back to the lab to work on my listening. Those two cats, man, they've worked with everybody. I've played and recorded with John [Edwards] and I've encountered him on the road too. I have a few thoughts. Number one, this is conceptually something that I've been thinking about over Covid, having worked with Val Jeanty and HPRizm over the years. I purchased a whole lot of electronics because I was like, there isn't gonna be live gigs and I don't want to be left in the dust. I purchased a sampler and other things and also I started to download, without giving any of my secrets away, what rooms sound like, like a church, like people are occupying it and what's going on.

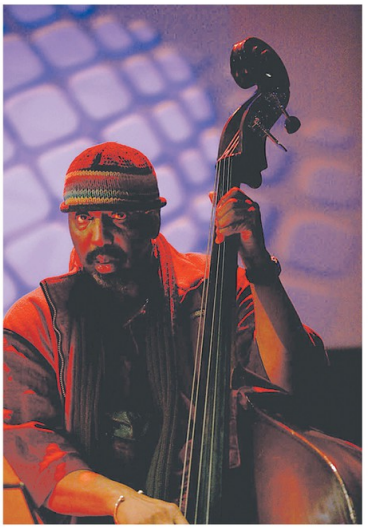
BC **Like field recordings?**

JBL Right, like field recording-type vibes. This recording reminds me of a field recording-type vibe, at least conceptually. That's the place that I always go to when it's that much space involving a laptop and playing with that idea. I've also recently listened to Marion Brown's *Afternoon Of A Georgia Faun*, where he's trying to capture where he's from. I've been thinking about that because that's a totally different process, and I'm still trying to figure out what that process looks like. These two gentlemen, they're legends. I'm not familiar with the person on a laptop but I am open to learning more about him.

BC **Is playing with musicians from the UK as opposed to Americans a different experience?**

JBL No. For me, John and Mark, they can bring it. I didn't really feel a difference. They have played with both US and UK musicians,

William Parker



Luciano Rossetti/courtesy AUM Fidelity

and they both work with a sax player who I absolutely love, Paul Dunmall. Freaking amazing. He was one of the first people I heard at the Vision Festival when I first moved here – it may have been my second or third year here. He's also someone more people should talk about. But I've had my ear on the UK vibes for a while. When I was a kid, Courtney Pine and the whole Acid Jazz thing down to Soweto Kinch. Really amazing improvisor. This is before... Shabaka [Hutchings] is around my age and I'm talking about before him. Soweto is an amazing lyricist, saxophonist, and really was bridging that gap. Same thing with Courtney Pine.

William Parker
"We The People Who Are Darker Than Blue"
From *I Plan To Stay A Believer: The Inside Songs Of Curtis Mayfield* (AUM Fidelity) 2010

JBL This is William Parker? Curtis Mayfield? That was Leena Conquest on vocals.

BC **I'll jump off the soul music theme. On *Eye Of I* your cover of Donny Hathaway's "Someday We'll All Be Free" is quite a departure from the original.**

JBL First off, shout-out to William Parker. The Parkers, I call them my New York City parents. I can lean on them. I always loved Donny Hathaway since I was in my early twenties. He also went to Howard University and that's where I learned about his legacy and how brilliant a musician he was. Actually, my music history teacher was a classmate of Donny Hathaway and would often describe him as being able to play anything, be it classical, jazz...

It took me a while to feel comfortable with all of my influences that I have in my head, because how do you articulate those influences without it sounding like just another cover situation? I didn't want it to sound too sappy, this vibe, but of course there's nothing wrong with that. Plus, I come from a tradition. I'm from Buffalo, Charles Gayle's from there, Grover Washington, Jr is from Buffalo. I felt like I had come up with an arrangement that was not just me remaking it as how he would have done it but putting a little bit of top intro, kind of power chords, in the beginning.

BC **Yours is a radically different take. The original had vocals and your version takes on that dynamic all instrumentally.**

JBL Yeah, it's completely different, a military kind of vibe with the snare and then putting in accompaniment up underneath the verse. As I'm playing the melody, if someone is listening to that and if you don't know the lyrics, you wouldn't know that I was playing the song...

BC **For sure...**

JBL ...until you went back and then you realise what I did. It was like, how do I articulate the essence of this song and still make it personal to me, but keep some of the juice, the good parts?

BC **With *I Plan To Stay A Believer*, William Parker showcased his influences. He showed it doesn't necessarily need to be only jazz.**

JBL Well, it's no different than when you hear Sonny Rollins and he says he loved Louis Jordan. It's the same vibe. We have a certain thing that we're expecting this person to do and stay within that thing and not considering their lived experience.

John Coltrane
"Psalm"
From *A Love Supreme* (Impulse!) 1965

JBL [Laughs as soon as Coltrane's saxophone kicks in] Let me guess, this is John Coltrane. It's interesting: when you hear [drummer] Elvin [Jones] play, he makes it sound like timpani. It's crazy. I don't know anybody who can play that. It's a healthy reminder of where the bar is but not the bar that you have to be *that*. What's your own bar? That's another thing that Wadada would have say was, 'What is your version of that?' What problem are you wrestling with compositionally? What are you thinking about and can you peel back those layers, that onion, and get analytical. We are always asking why and there's never an answer. There is only just peeling back.

BC **Coltrane is 'playing' a poem here, almost preaching. Do you view your playing in a similar way, that you are preaching with your saxophone in a way?**

JBL Sometimes there is a specific way in which I'm playing that will lend itself to... I don't think I'm preaching necessarily, but I will borrow from those influences. It can't be stated enough, the church influence. It's such an influence [that] maybe jazz departments across America can make going to a church a field trip since it's such a talked about topic.

I will say that there's a way that I'm building the melody to build drama, so I guess you could say that there's an arc similar to that of a preacher and hearing a sermon. If you listen to "Within You Are Answers" , it's pretty much the *"amen"* part of church. If you take the title track of *Eye Of I*, that's built similarly to the cadence of a sermon.

Anteloper
"Delfin Rosado"
From *Pink Dolphins* (International Anthem) 2022

JBL The hardest thing for me to do is to create space, which was one of the genius qualities about [trumpeter and bandleader] Jaimie Branch when I played with her – space. It was what she was doing when the horn wasn't in her mouth that I was, like, fuck.

BC **Jaimie played on one of your records.** Yeah, she played on *An Unruly Manifesto* and we toured. Anthony Pirog is also on that record, Luke Stewart and Warren Trae Crudup III. That's what I always walked away with any time I was fortunate to share the bandstand with her was her use of space – knowing when to play, when not to play. My intensity when I'm playing is like I'm just trying to blow the paint off the walls, which is fine. But there's something to be said about getting the same result as if you were a growing flower under a time/lapse-type situation. The same intensity except it's taking it's time to bloom.

The thing that I liked about Jaimie was her attitude, too. I needed that energy, especially on *An Unruly Manifesto*. I was thinking about manifestos and Ornette Coleman, Don Cherry and Charlie Haden, and their music being manifestos and taking stances. That was a beautiful vibe to capture on a recording, that kind of attitude, like, this is what we're about, now deal with it. I wrote a manifesto for that album, interestingly enough. So, yeah, that's space.

Matthew Shipp Trio
"Jazz Posture"
From *World Construct* (ESP-Disk') 2022

JBL Alright!

BC **I've read Matthew Shipp is a mentor of yours. How did you meet him?**

JBL I was going to CalArts. 2010 is when I graduated and I stuck around at school for an extra two years or in that community for two years. I would say probably the end of 2010, Matthew was on the cover of *Signal To Noise*. I was reading the article and I was like, yeah, man, I need to meet him. Six months later, ASCAP has an announcement that Matthew Shipp is going to be in a residency at the Atlantic Center for the Arts in Florida. At that point I was like, I gotta meet him, because the whole idea of...I think that's why I labelled my album *Divine Travels*... that's how I was living my life. I was seeing connections and things to other people that they might not see. But, for me, I saw him on this magazine, I related to him and now ASCAP [American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers] is announcing him [for a Master Artists-in-Residence position in 2011]. I applied to the Atlantic Center of the Arts and I met Matthew Shipp in 2011.

BC **What was the idea behind his residency there?**

JBL I go there, I'm in the swamp and I get to study with this person every day for three weeks. I've been to Howard, I was at CalArts and had a sizable amount of music under my fingers, but meeting Matthew further expanded my palette of what was possible. He starts telling me about Dennis Sandole, who was one of Coltrane's teachers, he starts telling me about his experience going to New England Conservatory, he starts telling me about Third Stream music, all these things. And there was a pivotal moment. I was supposed to meet Sam Rivers that summer, but I think he was sick. Matthew was able to get the rhythm section who played all these years with Sam Rivers in Florida to come, Michael Welch and Doug Mathews. So, Matthew says to me, 'James, have you ever played with just a bass and a drum?' I said no. He said, 'I'm going to have Sam Rivers' rhythm section come to Atlantic Center and you're gonna play with them.' The next thing you know, I'm playing and my ideas were endless. I can take the melodic line wherever I wanted it to go and I didn't feel restricted, I didn't feel anything. I felt like it was probably the best sensation musically I've ever had in my life.

Matthew started the idea that I should record with William Parker and Gerald Cleaver. He said, 'Just take my word for it. You should reach out to them.' So I record with them in 2011 and fast forward I come here to New York in 2011. Matthew has been vital in my life and he's a renegade. He says what's on his mind and does whatever he wants. He's somebody that I can still call and get advice from. If he didn't encourage, if Wadada didn't, if James Newton didn't, then maybe I wouldn't be in New York. ○

Marc Hollander

The Belgian polymath has practised wild cross-cultural fusion across the discography of his Crammed Discs label and alongside Véronique Vincent in Aksak Maboul

By Julian Cowley
Photography by Thomas Ost

"I've always been instinctively averse to pigeonholing, as a musician, record label boss and as a person in general," declares Marc Hollander. The largely self-taught multi-instrumentalist, based in Brussels, formed Aksak Maboul in 1977. This year that enigmatic outfit release their fifth album, *Une Aventure De VV* on Crammed Discs, the label Hollander founded at the start of the 1980s. Like Aksak Maboul, Crammed has been consistently unpredictable and unapologetically multifaceted. It's a label that is guaranteed to bewilder listeners who prefer music to be neatly classified, and conveniently assigned to some recognisable category. Over the years, reviewers and commentators have frequently tried to pin down in print the music that Hollander makes and releases, to attach readymade tags that consumers can cling to. "Such simplistic and superficial reductionism makes me cringe," he exclaims.

So what of Aksak Maboul, that mysterious name? What can that tell us? Hollander explains that *Onze Danses Pour Combattre La Migraine*, the group's stylistically kaleidoscopic debut album, began as a solo project. Pianist and producer Marc Moulin, who had heard Hollander playing keyboards with Belgian fusion group Cos, invited him to make a record to launch his new label Kamikaze. Hollander's close friend Vincent Kenis joined him in the studio, and took on an increasingly creative role as the sessions progressed, playing instruments, contributing to the writing, co-producing and even engineering some of the tracks. "At that point we decided to form a band and play concerts," Hollander recalls. Clearly a name was required. "Aksak means something like limping in Turkish, and refers to uneven rhythms in Turkish and Arab music. The word maboul has passed from Arabic into French, and means mad or crazy. As a whole, Aksak Maboul doesn't make much sense, but I liked the sound when I coined it."

And that name has stuck, through a series of musical mutations and changes of personnel. The latest incarnation of Aksak Maboul is essentially Hollander with his wife, singer Véronique Vincent, whose remarkable ability to match his allusive yet elusive music with sophisticated, playful lyrics is evident once again on *Une Aventure De VV*.

A spirit of playfulness has in fact characterised Hollander's work from the outset. He approaches the process of making music with a healthy combination of irony and wonder. "It's make-believe music, a game played with techno, contemporary classical, jazz and non-Western music. Fake songs ... all tackled in a naive and intuitive way. How do I dare make these impressions of genres that I haven't mastered, or even learned?"

Hollander, fluent in French and English, has tuned in appreciatively to a linguistic plurality that has surrounded him throughout his life. "Brussels sits on the border of the Latin and Anglo-Germanic worlds, with many other languages being spoken. The way I listen to music, and approach the world, has certainly been informed by this, and by the fact that Belgium is a sort of in-between land, open to all foreign influences, with a less strong sense of national identity, a less overwhelming national narrative than neighbouring countries."

Growing up in Belgium's capital city during the 1960s, he was in the right place at the right time to explore music, and teach himself to play it, on the basis of a few early piano lessons, without the hindrance of some dominant genre or hierarchy of styles. Listening to European radio stations, and exploring the vinyl collection of the city's public library, he absorbed not only current pop and rock trends, but a dazzling multiplicity of musical languages. There were particular albums, such as The Soft Machine's *Volume Two*, Frank Zappa's *Uncle Meat* and Captain Beefheart's *Trout Mask Replica*, that proved to be strong formative influences, but Hollander's horizons were expanded by encounters with such disparate figures as Alice Coltrane, Olivier Messiaen, Howlin' Wolf, Kraftwerk, Eric Dolphy, George Antheil and Terry Riley. Crucially, he also became acquainted with a wide range of global musical traditions, from Africa, Asia, the Balkans and the Arab world.

"Instinctively, I started drawing from all kinds of genres and styles when I began playing music, combining different things I've heard, and I've kept doing that. Elements from every type of music that appeals to me gets incorporated in my own compositions." Although this magpie tendency may challenge some conventional notions of originality, it is by no means a unique approach. Hollander mentions Romani musicians he has worked with, in the context of Crammed, who engage in a comparable process, absorbing music they have been exposed to, ranging in style from medieval European ballads to Bollywood soundtracks. "I'm fortunate to have an imperfect grasp of the music I hear," he adds with characteristically self-deprecating humour. " So when I do try to play something in the style of someone else, my imitations tend to fail, and turn into something personal."

Finding viable ways to combine such an assortment of ingredients is a challenge that Hollander has met enthusiastically since the conception of Aksak Maboul, and throughout the steady growth of the Crammed catalogue. Collage and montage forms, so characteristic of early 20th century aesthetic practices in the West, remained a vital component of experimentation in the arts when Hollander was starting to envisage music of his own, and pondering ways to compose it. Dynamic simultaneity, revelatory juxtapositions and startling acts of assemblage were integral to the character of the 60s, embedded in Beat poetry, protruding from the canvases of Robert Rauschenberg, embodied in Happenings and, indeed, audible in the early music of The Soft Machine and Frank Zappa.

"I've always dabbled with collage," Hollander acknowledges. "Starting with a little reel-to-reel tape machine I used as a teenager. I'm always trying to cram too many ideas in one song. I sincerely admire people who can remain simple, but I tend to build tracks by combining fragments. I like the way disjunctions and accidents create surprises and can make the music evolve in a cinematic way, or become kaleidoscopic. Juxtapositions of widely divergent elements create a gap you have to bridge, actively, with your imagination." The music of Aksak Maboul invites such active participation. Listeners are invited to weave their own narratives, to project their own stories.

Hollander and Véronique share a passion for literature. He makes special mention of Raymond Roussel, an extraordinary French writer who devised his own eccentric systems to generate fabulous texts, such as *Locus Solus* (1914). These submerged procedures function like concealed mechanisms, entirely hidden from readers and totally detached from notions of personal expression. Hollander recognises similarity between Roussel's quirky compositional methods and his own experience

Amateur Doubles

Marc Hollander (right) at home with Véronique Vincent in Brussels, January 2023

of working in the studio, recording one layer, then superimposing another, "and then you remove the foundations and leave that second layer hanging in mid-air. That can create a really strange effect."

Hollander is especially drawn to elliptical narratives, those modes of storytelling that embrace discontinuity, unexpectedly shift viewpoint or make unexplained leaps. He cites the novels of Alain Robbe-Grillet and Nathalie Sarraute as notable instances of such narrative practice. The films of Jean-Luc Godard and Michelangelo Antonioni provide further examples. "You get a sense that the story is larger than what you see, that it is continuing off-screen, and it's up to you to complete it. On another level, I love it when a pop music track ends with a fade-out, in which some totally new elements appear just as the track is going away."

Readers who are already aware of Aksak Maboul's idiosyncratic history over the years may recognise that it does, in itself, constitute an elliptical and disjointed narrative. Here, in summary, is the story so far: after the debut album appeared in November 1977, Hollander and Véronique enrolled other musicians, and took that music on the road. Kenis had departed by the time of 1980 second album *Un Peu De L'Âme Des Bandits*. Henry Cow's guitarist and violin player Fred Frith and drummer Chris Cutler were by that time in the line-up. Hollander reciprocated by joining them to tour Europe as a member of Art Bears, and also played saxophone and clarinet on Frith's solo album *Gravity*.

Un Peu De L'Âme Des Bandits opens with a stomping Bo Diddley riff, served up with Catherine Jauniaux's twittery vocals as a topping, then takes a detour via a tango performed among potted palms, before alighting on a sinuous Turkish melody that unfurls like a beefed-up Third Ear Band raga. A different incarnation of Aksak Maboul in action; at once strikingly different and strangely familiar.

Then came what Hollander calls "Aksak Maboul's little-documented avant-no wave phase". It involved an improbable merger with Les Tueurs De La Lune De Miel, a Belgian group channelling unruly free jazz and punk rock energies. Kenis was back in the frame playing bass and guitar and singing. In Anglicised guise, as The Honeymoon Killers they recorded an album issued by Crammed in 1981. At the same time Hollander and Véronique were concocting a set of effervescent electro pop songs. This buoyant music seemed to them an anomaly during the early 80s, and the duo abandoned their project, incomplete.

30 years later it was retrieved, dusted down and overhauled to become Aksak Maboul's *Ex-Futur Album*, prompting Stereolab's Laetitia Sadier to speak of it in terms of a reunion with long lost parents. So in 2014, in response to the warm reception of that recording, the group – now featuring Hollander and Veronique's daughter Faustine on bass – toured Europe. It swelled to become the Aksak Maboul Revue show, with onstage contributions from guest artists Sadier, Aquaserge and Jaakko Eino Kalevi.

"When I started to write and record music again, in 2016," Hollander observes, "I had to learn for the first time how to use music software. I'd actually stopped recording even before the advent of MIDI! I experienced a sort of epiphany. This digital medium works fantastically well for me, being able to use fragments from recorded improvisations and field recordings. I found it liberating, as well as a lot of fun." So *Figures*, a fourth Aksak Maboul album, steadily took shape and surfaced in 2020. In the interim, the resurrected *Ex-Futur Album* had been viewed anew and reimagined within a variety of different perspectives. *16 Visions Of Ex-Futur* includes reworkings of the original tracks by other musicians including Burnt Friedmann, Lena Willikens and Bérangère Maximin. In due course, *Figures* too became *Redrawn* from the viewpoints of Carl Stone, Hello Skinny and Stubbleman, among others.

Crammed Discs, which Hollander has run in collaboration with Hanna Gorjaczkowska and with significant input from Vincent Kenis, has provided an outlet for all these various manifestations of Aksak Maboul, including the reissue of *Onze Danses*. Hollander has pointed out that the name Crammed when reversed spells De Marc, indicating (with a superfluous letter) that it is his personal label. He has also conceded that he was not actually conscious of that verbal encryption at the time he alighted on the name. The label has also provided a home for Californian post-punk experimentalists Tuxedomoon, the felicitous alliance of French electronic composer Hector Zazou and Congolese singer Bony Bikaye, John Lurie's moody soundtracks to Jim Jarmusch's films *Down By Law* and *Stranger Than Paradise*, the exhilarating Romani music of Taraf De Haïdouks and engaging bossa nova electronica of Bebel Gilberto, to pluck just a handful of examples from the label's extensive catalogue.

"People have tried to define us as 'arty post new wave,' 'electronic,' 'world music', but in fact we just follow our instincts, do as we please and keep aiming to escape such categories." Adding a characteristically ironic flourish, Hollander singles out the folk-rooted explorations of Argentinian singer Juana Molina as music that might be filed under the heading: post-genre. Having said that he and Gorjaczkowska, part of whose role involves marketing and distribution, have at times struggled with the practical reality that potential listeners to particular artists, whose music they might possibly love, could be deterred, or excluded, by the lack of a clear-cut Crammed Discs identity.

There have been reluctant, pragmatic compromises. So, in 1984 they introduced the Made To Measure imprint, an annex to accommodate music, such as Lurie's soundtracks, that have been conceived to accompany work in other media, such as film, theatre and dance. Later in the 80s, Hollander's enthusiasm for developments in techno and house led him to establish the SSR imprint, and the drum 'n' bass subsidiary Selector. Despite these concessions to taxonomic demarcation, Crammed remains at heart a borderless territory where, during the past year, new releases have arrived from Angolan electronic artist Batida, Dutch lutenist Josef Van Wissem, the scintillating supergroup Congotronics International, featuring Konono No 1 and Kasai Allstars and now, once again, Aksak Maboul.

"When I started to make music again I had to learn how to use music software. This digital medium works fantastically well for me, being able to use fragments"

Despite Hollander's commitment to generic indeterminacy, *Une Aventure De VV* is openly offered as an instance of songspiel. This may in part be a preemptive strike, aimed at the hardcore classifiers, a wry espousal of an old and not notably fashionable genre. But it is also an accurate description of a work in which dialogue features as well as songs, narrating a dramatic tale peopled with fantastic creatures. Its conversations between humans and non-humans may actually spring from Véronique's readings in the work of anthropologist Philippe Descola, but as a dramatic device it sits comfortably within the received conventions of songspiel.

"Composing and recording, I'm mostly guided by intuition," Hollander affirms. "I always leave the door open to accidents and coincidences, which generate impressions or emotions you wouldn't be able to create on purpose. For some of these pieces I improvised, then selected harmonies, melodies or textures I liked, and worked on those." He explains how the opening section of "L'Ombre Double" is based upon a piano improvisation that he recorded on his phone, then transferred to his computer, where it was edited and orchestrated with addition of synthesizer, sax, flute, bass clarinet and percussion. The second part of the same track is indicative of another compositional approach, starting with a rhythm track that provided a basis for improvisation, followed by a process of overdubbing, structuring and arranging.

Elsewhere on this album there is pure collage, assembled from field recordings and samples from other tracks, even from previous records. "I enjoy dropping musical self-quotes," he says. "They give a sense of continuity and familiarity, even when you

can't exactly identify them." It is remarkable that Aksak Maboul's music remains so readily identifiable, despite the contextual twists and turns and the chronological leaps and lapses of the group's singular history. Despite Hollander's readiness to saturate himself in such a wide range of other music, and to let it filter through a process of psychoacoustic osmosis into his own work, the outcome is invariably, audibly the music of Aksak Maboul. The group's sound is as distinctive as that of Hollander's Farfisa organ, purchased in 1969. It featured on *Onze Danses* and appears again now, on *Une Aventure*.

A persistent feature of Aksak Maboul has been Hollander's ability to write memorable melodies. Sometimes these are fleeting and fragmentary, undulating linear elements that surface within his juxtapositional montage structures. Still, they are a defining feature which, when allied to Véronique's finely fashioned lyrics, can result in beguiling pop tunes as well as more abstract narrative forms. "I tend to get very self-critical if I remain in one mood too long," he comments. "I love a melody which seems to repeat itself but doesn't quite, and keeps trickily shifting and permutating." He cites as good examples of such melodies "Spleenétique" and "Tout A Une Fin" on *Figures*, and "Le Mur" and "Zone Blanche" on the new album. "Chez Les Aborigènes", the track that opens *Ex-Futur Album*, with its endless permutations of three notes is another illuminating example. "This doesn't always make them easy to sing," Hollander adds.

Véronique has, however, consistently proved to be more than equal to such challenges. After growing up with a daily soundtrack of French chansons, interpreted by articulate artists such as Barbara, Georges Brassens and Serge Gainsbourg, she heard *Comme À La Radio*, singer Brigitte Fontaine's encounter in 1969 with members of The Art Ensemble Of Chicago. It revealed to her the alchemical potential of poetic lyrics, paired with adventurous music and channelled through a resourceful voice.

For all the pieces on *Une Aventure*, the music was written first, the lyrics followed. Although this is not always their way or working, Hollander acknowledges that while composing he usually tries to envisage what Véronique's role may be, where her vocals might take the music and what additional meanings, or further dimensions, might be brought to each piece by her lyrics. Working on those texts, however, Véronique consciously avoids the shaping of word patterns in order to match what she knows her voice can achieve. "For *Une Aventure*, I wrote the lyrics to precisely set melodic lines, working towards the appropriate number of syllables, or metric feet, for every line, with just a little leeway here and there. Once a song is written I then adapt my voice, approaching each text as something I have to interpret, which is not a matter of over-dramatising; it involves inflections, stresses on certain syllables, silences."

Writing within contours already established by the music can be, Véronique recognises, an enabling, even a liberating process, and it's a way of avoiding slack formulations that can arise simply through habit. She alludes to Georges Perec, a member of the Oulipo group of writers, who deliberately produced their work within self-imposed formal or thematic constraints. Perec, who died in 1982, famously wrote his novel *La Disparition* (*The Disappearance*) without using the letter e. He employed such ludic means to address profoundly serious issues and is, Véronique says, always a presence in some corner of her head.

"I tend to conceive every song like a story, even when that's not apparent in the end result," she continues. "*Une Aventure* is a bit different, of course, as we went for the idea of having a single story running through the entire album, with quite a few spoken sections. The story takes place in an indeterminate period and in various settings." The strange narrative that unfolds, centring on VV, a disoriented figure who has lost her language, is coloured by a multiplicity of musical moods. "We decided to use of different modes of vocal expression too, and included additional characters, which makes the album more like a play." Those characters include a robin and a heron, a tightrope walker and a shadow. On the recording those diverse voices are supplied by Faustine Hollander, Laetitia Sadier, and members of the groups Aquaserge and Family Fodder.

"Working on both *Figures* and *Une Aventure*," Hollander observes "Véronique and I followed parallel processes. Consciously or involuntarily we both accumulate ideas, references, quotes. And when we get down to work, we sift, distil, combine, construct. Both music and lyrics have many layers, which aren't necessarily perceptible, but they contribute to making these albums what they are."

In a note accompanying the printed text for *Une Aventure* (which includes a bilingual translation) Aksak Maboul offer thanks to Perec, Victor Hugo and a small selection of other French writers. Film directors Jean-Luc Godard and Sergio Leone are also credited with lending a hand, together with Archie Shepp, John Tchicai, Igor Stravinsky and Maurice Ravel. "Those names, mentioned in the acknowledgements, don't represent all our inspirations for this record," Véronique explains. "They're there simply because I've literally quoted some of those writers' words, or a phrase from those musicians has been quoted by Marc. I read in a newspaper a sentence from the dialogue of a Sergio Leone movie, and I thought it resonated with my story." So that serendipitous quotation found its way into the text.

"I read a lot," Véronique continues. "Ideas, words, sounds and rhythms from my reading get absorbed, percolate and later reverberate in my writing." 19th century author Victor Hugo's strange novel *L'Homme Qui Rit* (*The Man Who Laughs*) furnished the French phrase, describing the black cheek of a tempest, that opens the track "Fable". More generally, Véronique found herself haunted by Hugo's image of a child surviving a shipwreck, and endlessly running. Further research into Hugo's work led her to conceive the tempest in terms of a "storm of words and letters circling around the earth like a swarm of flies".

Such images spring readily to Veronique's mind. She is also an accomplished visual artist. Some of her portrait drawings feature on the cover for *Figures* (a multifaceted word that can mean faces in French). "I'm telling the same kinds of stories in a different medium," she observes. "Mostly I paint and draw faces which tell more about inner states than appearances. Comparably, my texts may describe events or surroundings, but essentially they present mental landscapes. Those texts are very carefully worked; my paintings are a lot more spontaneous, but they come from the same place."

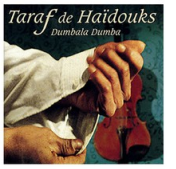
Reflecting on the two most recent releases from Aksak Maboul, Hollander notes that *Figures* involved a fairly long process of combination and distillation, whereas *Une Aventure*, begun in March 2020, during the first lockdown, was in its initial stages more spontaneous. The refinement began later. "We've already started to work on our next album," he reveals. "And I suspect that it will be a mix of both those approaches." So the history of Aksak Maboul, and the parallel narrative of Crammed Discs, are set to continue. Eccentric as they may seem, in their fragmentariness and their discontinuities, they may perhaps represent a shared human condition. "After all," Hollander reflects, "everybody has multiple affiliations. Every culture on the planet is composite and in perpetual evolution." ○

Aksak Maboul's *Une Aventure De VV* is released by Crammed Discs this month

Clive Bell surveys highlights from the vast catalogue of Marc Hollander's Crammed Discs, from Ethiopian crooners to Congotronic jams

Aksak Maboul
Un Peu De L'Âme Des Bandits
Crammed CD/DL/LP 1980
The second outing for Marc Hollander's chameleonic combo features Fred Frith and Chris Cutler from British avant rockers Henry Cow, plus vocalist Catherine Jauniaux. Aksak was part of the radical pan-European coalition Rock In Opposition. The music is colourful with a bubbling, playful energy, and stands up well four decades later. "Inoculating Rabies" is a two minute skit, Frith thrash-rocking out plus layered bassoons from Michel Berckmans. This is Henry Cow on their day off.

Mahmoud Ahmed
Ere Mela Mela
Crammed LP 1986
Mahmoud Ahmed is the shoeshine boy made good, the Ethiopian singing star with the emotional tremor in his voice. This album was a reissue of important mid-1970s recordings. Sax rides over bubbling organ and tireless bass – the line-up may be cosmopolitan, but Ahmed stays true to his local scales and aesthetic. These eerie harmonies never seem to resolve, endlessly spinning out mesmeric, almost narcotic lines over gently rocking beats. Five of these songs were written by Shewalul Mengistu (1944–77), an Ethiopian poet, songwriter, journalist and campaigner for women's rights.

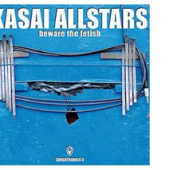


Taraf De Haïdouks
Dumbala Dumba
Crammed CD/LP 1998
"Margareta, do not flee/Come press yourself against me/So we can have some fun/Dum de dum de dum". The title track – sung by guest Viorica Rudăreasa — is a far from respectable Romani song from the seediest part of town, accompanied by accordion, fiddle and the racing hammers of a cimbalom. Taraf De Haïdouks (Band Of Outlaws) was started by the hugely talented violinist Nicolae Neascu in Clejani, a Romanian village full of musicians. Largely ignored back home, Taraf De Haïdouks were rescued from oblivion by Crammed's 1991 release of *Musique Des Tziganes De Roumanie.* Before long they were Johnny Depp's favourite band and modelling for Yohji Yamamoto. *Dumbala Dumba* is their third album and they're still flying.

Sussan Deyhim
Madman Of God
Crammed CD/DL 2000
This self-produced solo debut by the New York based Iranian diva Sussan Deyhim still sounds extraordinary. There's no shortage of traditional instruments, but the heady mix features several top American musicians, and it's a shock to realise that everything is based on the poetry of Sufi writers stretching back to the 11th century. Deyhim's voice, often layered, is a rich and subtle instrument, fluttering like an impossible butterfly.

Kočani Orkestar
Alone At My Wedding
Crammed CD/DL 2002
Kočani are a Macedonian brass orchestra, scampering like elephants on helium through a charming selection of Balkan wedding melodies. The bass section of four tubas is scarily tight. For their second album on Crammed the group expand their palette to include fluttering clarinet, sultry fiddle and a pair of male singers alongside the ever-pumping brass. On "Goodbye Macedonia" Bulgarian seven-beat rhythms spice things up further.

Konono No 1
Congotronics
Crammed CD/DL 2005
Way back before the Coachella festival performances and collaborations with Björk, Konono No 1's Mingiedi Mawangu was experimenting with attaching magnets salvaged from car wrecks to his likembés (thumb pianos). This was the 1960s in the suburbs of Kinshasa, Congo. A wall of amplifiers, junk percussion (more car parts) and vocals sung through vintage megaphones completed the Konono No 1 sound. Traditional Bazombo trance music underlays Mingiedi's efforts, but his very loud electro hybrid finally stunned the West in 2005 thanks to Crammed producer Vincent Kenis, who spent a long time simply trying to locate the band.



Kasai Allstars
Beware The Fetish
Crammed CD/DL 2014
This is the fifth in Crammed's Congotronics series, and Vincent Kenis's role is crucial: Kasai Allstars were assembled from five other groups, while everything is recorded in the Democratic Republic of Congo capital Kinshasa and mixed by Kenis back in Brussels. His production is lucid and sophisticated, shining a light inside this dense world and guiding the ear. If Kenis was watering down Congolese music there would be grounds for complaint, but the opposite seems to be the case: fevered buzzing and distortion complement village ritual lyrics that chant down the evil power of the fetish.

Hector Zazou
Géographies
(Made To Measure Vol 5)
Crammed CD/DL/LP 2021
This is an expanded reissue of early, unpindownable work from super-producer Hector Zazou, before he made his name with glamorous curatorial projects like hooking up a Corsican choir with Ryuichi Sakamoto, Jon Hassell and John Cale through the 1990s. But the sweeping ambition is already clear on *Géographies,* recorded in Paris. Zazou is in postmodern composer mode, switching from homage to Italian film soundtracks to classical vocals with string quartet. "Pali Kao" is a miniature opera, four acts in as many minutes. "Sidi Bel Abbès" is an evocation of Zazou's own home town in Algeria – towards the end he disrupts the harmonies by what sounds like leaning on the tape machine.

Creatures of the Night

Širom

The Slovenian trio's polyglot folk music taps into the myths and unconscious of the Balkan region to offer their own take on the New Weird Europe

By Miloš Hroch
Photography by Anja Smaka

Psychoanalysis experienced a boom in the former Yugoslavia in the late 1970s, with philosophers such as Slavoj Žižek and Mladen Dolar engaging in the ideas of Karl Marx and Jacques Lacan. Dolar offers one anecdote in his latest book *Od Kod Prihaja Oblast?* (*Where Do Power And Authority Come From?*) that connects Slovenia with the founding father of psychoanalysis. Sigmund Freud visited Slovenia, then a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in the spring of 1898 with his brother Alexander, and they stopped in the Karst region to see the Škocjan Caves. Freud described what he saw in the correspondence with his friend Wilhelm Fliess: "The Škocjan caves... are a gruesome miracle of nature, a subterranean river running through magnificent vaults, waterfalls, stalactite formations, pitch darkness, and slippery paths secured with iron railings. It was Tartarus itself. If Dante saw anything like this, he needed no great effort of imagination for his inferno." The excursion turns into a metaphysical journey for Freud, which, as Dolar puts it, "seems to foretell the epigraph of *The Interpretation Of Dreams*".

These mysterious landscapes, where rocky formations evoke mythical creatures with horsetails and giant tusks, are engraved in the labyrinthian music of Slovenian experimental folk group Širom. But shafts of warm and life-giving light are in there too. The trio – consisting of experienced improvisors Iztok Koren, Ana Kravanja and Samo Kutin – blend elements of traditional music from the Balkans, Mediterranean, Middle East and South Asia in a polyglot vision which they call imaginary folk. They add layers of post-rock grandiosity, avant garde drones and primal improvisations to create nomadic music that is nonetheless grounded in the places they come from.

Throughout an interview spread across two Zoom calls, the three often discuss their dreams out of a desire to document and interpret them. The subconscious plays an essential role in their creative process. During performances, they navigate towards trance states, and the titles of their records are conceived through collective automatic writing. Širom album covers use dream-like paintings by contemporary surrealist painter Marko Jakše.

"For me, the big inspiration is this inner life, inner psychological life," Iztok Koren tells me, by way of explaining as to why Slovenians are attracted to psychoanalysis. "Slovenian national personality is really split, we have this crisis of identity throughout all the history," he explains. "We are on the borders of Balkans and Europe on the other side. We are not Balkans, but not European as well. With the Roman, Byzantine and Austro-Hungarian empires and Yugoslavia after the First World War, we have a history of submission and shame about it. There is aggression and self-aggression, with high rates of suicides in Slovenia."

Outside the band, Koren is a social worker. "Moreover, the country is split with many dialects and micro-dialects, so people may not understand each other," he continues. "We are a bit schizophrenic. This is the context and environment that influence our music."

Indeed, Širom's music lies at the geographical, topographical and psychological crossroads, with each member coming from different regions of Slovenia, with different life stories. Vocalist and violinist Ana Kravanja is from the Karst Plateau in south-western Slovenia near Italy, famous for the underground cave systems that once enchanted and inspired Freud. "Visiting caves was always surprising, and I felt intense silence and respect for the underworld like most sensitive people do. It is like diving into yourself with all that darkness, silence, echo, cold," she says, recalling her childhood memories. "Landscape reflects everything in us."

Hurdy-gurdy player Samo Kutin was born in the Alpine foothills of the Tolminsko region. This mountain area is one of the wildest parts of this small country, in the heart of Triglav National Park, where you can still walk for hours without encountering any humans. As a child, Kutin heard stories about hermits living in caves, fables about mythical snakes or tales about treasure hunters. "This unknown aspect of the nature had a tremendous impact on me," he says, "and I searched for it in my music." Finally, banjo player Iztok Koren was raised in the flatlands of the Prekmurje region surrounding the Mura River in the north east, close to the Hungarian border. When we speak, Koren and his family are visiting his parents in their home village Beltinci. "People are proudly melancholic here and it is something I bring to Širom," he confesses. "We are all different personalities. Samo is not melancholic. He is more a survival type and knows how to enjoy life. Ana has an intuitive and stubborn personality, as she grew up close to Italy. We try to reach the common point, which sometimes is a long road to walk. That's probably what makes our music interesting. It would not be that multidimensional if we had much more unified taste."

Širom in Ljubljana, January 2023: (from left) Samo Kutin, Iztok Koren, Ana Kravanja

The trio's musical universe extends far beyond Širom, helping to sketch the story of the Slovenian underground of the past two decades. For the past 13 years, experienced free improvisors Kravanja and Kutin have been running Bučno, a workshop for improvising arts. Before Širom, they had a kalimba duo Najoua in the early 2010s. They still record albums together, such as 2021's *Cumulus Spores* whose rural epiphanies evoke fictional medieval music made on hurdy-gurdy and Balkan traditional string instruments tampura brač and çifteli with acoustic resonators, alongside and the violin and viola.

Duing our Sunday morning Zoom meeting Kravanja was at her village home an hour outside the Slovenian capital Ljubljana, and Kutin was helping his family with farm work in the village of Čadrg. The internet connection from the mountains in Tolminsko was feeble, causing Samo's screen to glitch and occasionally turn goblin green when it wasn't wildly multiplying. These conditions only underlined the impression that folk tales about magic and spells reflected real life.

"We started a punk band with my twin brother without knowing anything about music," Kutin begins. The twins were educated in music by their older brothers and rehearsed after they'd finished their daily tasks around the farmstead. Curiosity then led Kutin to the folk music he grew up with. In the late 2000s, they formed a group called Salamandra Salamandra: "It was a breakthrough,

"Trance induced by repetition and cycling of motives, music made to put people in altered states and help them cope with the hardness of life" Samo Kutin

and it allowed me to travel the folk festivals around the world. We used a strange mix of guitars, drums, keyboards, horns and many different objects we found around the house and garage."

Kutin started to learn various instruments as he explored Moroccan Gnawa music and the drones he heard during a year spent in India. He also immersed himself in free improvisation to unchain his musical imagination. "Many things were happening at the same time around 2010. Before that, I had been jumping between part time jobs like waiter, taxi driver, gardener, or working in the fields. My friend brought me a hurdy-gurdy, and I started busking, which earned me enough to live. People saw me performing in the streets, and they started to invite me to concerts or workshops. After two years of busking, it was impossible to play in the streets because I did not have any time."

Since then Kutin has recorded albums with established figures in free improvisation, including French saxophonist Jean-Luc Guionnet, Swedish saxophonist Martin Küchen and British sound artist Lee Patterson, or recently with French sound artist Pascal Battus.

For her part, classically trained and conservatory educated Kravanja studied flute and violin, before moving on to studying painting at Ljubljana's Academy of Fine Arts and Design. After she moved to Slovenia's capital, she briefly played the bass in a punk band called Klasofobia and thereafter pursued an interest in improvisation. She met Kutin through the free improvisation workshop titled Reflect-React, organised by Slovenian double bass player Tomaž Grom, also curator of the Zavod Sploh label. "At that time, Japanese percussionist Seijiro Murayama was in Slovenia, and many young people felt this moment strongly, which led them to improvisation," recalls Kravanja. "The workshop was partly inspired by the improvisation workshop by AMM's Eddie Prévost and was held every Tuesday with around 30 people.

"We were very serious about it," she continues. "The workshop joined musicians from different scenes, whether jazz, alternative rock, global music or classical music." This was certainly true for Kutin and Kravanja who, after their workshop meeting, formed Najoua, a duo playing several differently tuned and homemade kalimbas. "Kalimbas have a lot of frequencies. At some point, you hear other additional sounds, and it calls your voice to sing with it," explains Kravanja, who had to overcome a childhood block before she could start to explore her voice. Elsewhere she has collaborated with the Austrian based pianist and composer Elisabeth Harnik and violinist and ethnomusicologist Tijana Stanković.

Koren meanwhile grew up in the underground, his education coming from a web of DIY labels. "Until I was 13, I didn't listen to music. I could not do it. Every time I listened to music, I felt a lot of shame." Eventually, alongside his brother and friends from his hometown Beltinci, he summoned up enough courage to form ŠKM Banda, their name derived from the initials of Slovene antifascist partisan Štěfan Kovač. Early influences included Yugoslavia-era Serbian post-punk bands like Ekatarina Velika or Disciplin A Kitschme, American math rock bands and the Constellation label's catalogue, from where Koren learned instrumental music could also be politically radical.

In 2002, Koren and his bandmates joined with local artist Dani Kavaš, an activist against right wing factions and clericalism, to establish a squat in a defunct textile factory in Beltinci. They galvanised the scene by setting up rehearsal rooms and organising concerts and lectures. Until the squat was closed down in 2015, Koren founded other projects like the industrial noise band Hexenbrutal. His musical tastes also take in harsh noise, Richard Skelton's ambient drone, and post-metal outfits like Neurosis – "not because of noise and screaming, but because of this heavy feeling," he asserts.

Najoua's Kutin and Kravanja crossed paths with Koren's post-rock group ŠKM Banda on a joint tour in 2013, and that's where Širom's idea of playing acoustic drone was born. Around this time, Koren was attracted to the so-called New Weird America scene featuring bands like Pelt, Jack Rose and Six Organs Of Admittance. "It was an inspiration to go more into acoustic instruments, which showed on ŠKM Banda's 2014 album *Panontikon*. Before that, I had been playing only electronic guitars, synthesizers and drums." He started to dig into Alan Lomax's folkloristic and ethnomusicological writings and Harry Smith's *Anthology Of American Folk Music*. This transformative period led to his present activities of recording solo albums with distorted homemade banjo and panoply of other instruments. "At a certain age, you must question yourself about your position and direction in life," he reasons. "In Indian astrology, they call it Sade Sati. It is associated with Saturn and the position of the planets. My Sade-Sati started in 2014 when I changed instruments, and I worked with homeless people, which led me to near burnout."

His current vocation sometimes involves giving individual counselling to perpetrators of domestic violence or prisoners. When I ask what attracted him to music so geographically distant from Slovenia, he responds in a very Proustian way: "The feeling of roots. It felt familiar when I discovered these archives, especially music from the Appalachian Mountains. It has something to do with smells. My home region Prekmurje has this certain smell you can feel whenever you go outside to the woods. This smell arouses in me these feelings that take me to early childhood and even stages before I could talk. It is a body feeling. But I want to use these feelings modernly – not to revoke past but establish connections."

Širom are not alone in this endeavour of blending ancient and modern music. In the feature that named the New Weird America movement, published in *The Wire* 234 in 2003, David Keenan observed several characteristics. Most importantly, "interpretation of what constitutes 'folk music' is unusually wide" and "the music is an expression of a self-supporting community of likeminded individuals, all dedicated to finding their own voice and creating art as free from outside influence as possible".

Keenan also identifies the combination of free improvisation and utilisation of drone: "Improvisation and the application of the drone open up these new folk musicians to the roar of the cosmos. In the process, they have stripped improvisation of jazz-informed reputation as a cerebral discipline and rebirthed it as the original, primal musical gesture, reminding us that it was always folk music's most natural mode of expression."

Even though the scene in Europe is less interconnected than projects under the umbrella of New Weird America in the 2000s, it is tempting to frame a New Weird Europe. You can find traces all over continent: just unfold the map and follow (mostly) the sound of the hurdy-gurdy. There are strong traces in scenes in Western Europe across Belgium and France, taking in projects like Ernest Bergez's Sourdure from the French Massif Central area, and Razen from Brussels, which grew into a larger ensemble featuring bagpipes. The operations of the Gothenburg label Discreet Music and groups like Enhet För Fri Musik can be added to the mosaic, as can guitarists Jakub Šimanský and Tomáše Niesner from the Czech Republic. From the south of Europe you find strange, hurdy-gurdy driven jams on the Italian label Boring Machines.

Coming from the crossover between Central Europe and the Balkans, Širom's members point to an affinity with some of these musicians, especially the minimalist folk trio La Tène. Recently, they participated in a three day residency with hurdy-gurdy player Yann Gourdon from the medieval drone and motorik rock outfit France, the results of which are set to be released on a forthcoming album. "We can relate to what Yann is doing," says Koren.

Beginning with their 2016 debut record *I*, Širom's body of work has steadily grown, 2022's *The Liquified Throne Of Simplicity* being their most recent release. They craft music that is communal and organic. It might be situated on the post-rock canvas, but it takes limitless detours and is vibrating with life. Assembled mostly out of live sessions, their albums juxtapose Kravanja's celestial voice with the myriad twists in timbre and textures of peculiar instruments: ocarina, balafon, lyre, lute, banjo, plus homemade acoustic resonators or found objects like bowls filled with lentils.

The group embraced the tag imaginary folk to describe their music, and put their own spin on the concept. The phrase was invented by French musicologist and composer Serge Moreux in his 1953 study framing Bela Bartók's interest in a wide variety of folklore music from his home country Hungary, but also from Romania or Slovakia and elsewhere.

"It is important to be honest and sincere in the music you put out," responds Kravanja when I ask what folk music means to them. "The relationship to life and awareness of the values your ancestors had for land or nature is folk for me." Kutin and Kravanja dwell outside Ljubljana and make art for a living, composing music for theatre, cartoons and fairytales, and performing with different ensembles and projects. "For this kind of music, it is crucial to be grounded. If I lived in the city without long walks in the wild nature, I would not be able to make the music I do," says Kutin. Kravanja interjects to note her agrarian passion: "Nature and gardening are important."

From their responses, it's clear that folk music is as much defined by commonality and togetherness as instruments and melodies. Still, I ask what, if anything, in the form of a folk song is shared across traditions they've encountered. "Trance induced by repetition and cycling of motives, that music is made to put people in altered states and help them cope with the hardness of life," offers Kutin.

Širom's soundscapes range across forests, mountains, steppes, deserts and seas, as they create their no-border music. It taps into holistic ideas about pancultural folk music proposed by Jon Hassell or Don Cherry. Koren cites both as an influence, although he admits that he discovered the latter through Alejandro Jodorowsky's film *The Holy Mountain*. "I feel that something flows through him, that he is a medium. I love the Taoist philosophy of life, which is very non-anthropocentric, in which nature consists of different flows and cycles, and we are only a small part. In this approach to reality is a lot of humbleness. Flow is also essential in Širom. It is not about how we play instruments, but about how the music flows, as part of the greater dance of the universe." ○

Širom tour the UK this month: see Out There

Širom performing on an outdoor tour of rural Slovenia, 2021

Aljaž Kužner

We jam econo

The Necks

No group in creative music is quite like the Australian trio, whose modal and minimalist performances extend a single idea to infinity

By Daniel Spicer
Photography by Lukas Wenninger & Henry Butterworth

Over the last few decades, Australian trio The Necks have forged a distinctive approach to improvisation that avoids both the grandstanding, individualist solos of jazz and the action-reaction dialogues of improv. Instead, they've doggedly pursued the perfection of slowly unfolding, longform, spontaneous compositions in which all three musicians lock into unshakable group-mind synergy. Their live performances and their many studio creations are intense, collaborative journeys, exemplified by their stunning new album *Travel*, that bespeak a preternaturally close bond and shared objective.

So it's curious that, since the trio's inception in Sydney in 1987, they've spent surprisingly little time together. Throughout most of their history, they haven't even all been living in the same hemisphere. Speaking to them separately over Zoom on three consecutive days, I find three geographically dispersed individuals who, though all extremely affable, display quite different personalities. In Sydney, keyboardist Chris Abrahams is thoughtful and just a little diffident. Bassist Lloyd Swanton, 100 kilometres west in the Blue Mountains, wields a dry wit and a keen memory for dates and figures. Furthest flung, and projecting a slightly more restless, urgent energy, is Tony Buck, drummer and percussionist, who left Australia not long after the group were founded, relocating first to Japan, then to Amsterdam and finally to Berlin, where he has resided for over 20 years.

"We've never really all lived in the same city," Abrahams, who was born in New Zealand, muses. "Probably the most we've done was really early on, in the late 80s, when we were all in Sydney, but I think Tony left in 1989. For a long time after that, we'd only get together in December, January – it was just two months of the year when we were all in Australia and we'd do a series of gigs and record something and then go our separate ways."

Buck's recollection is slightly different: "I think I left in 1991. I was back in Australia a good few times in the first few years, and we always decided, well, let's do something then. It taught us to use our time well. You set aside these periods and fill it with really productive stuff."

Certainly, the paucity of proximity hasn't stopped them from developing an extremely tight working relationship. "When we come to The Necks," Abrahams states, "it could actually just be, I get off a plane, Lloyd gets off a plane, Tony gets off a plane, we go straight backstage at the venue, we walk onstage and play. That wouldn't seem odd. We're comfortable with each other, we trust each other – I think trust is a very important aspect of it. We know how to make Necks music."

Before the pandemic, they still regularly convened in Australia for a month or so each year – "around January, February, March, basically to escape the Berlin winter," Buck deadpans – and, in this way, over the years, they've been able to record more than a dozen studio albums. They've also built up an extensive touring calendar, hitting the road each year not just in Australia but, increasingly, in Europe and, to a lesser degree, in the US. "It's slowly picked up momentum," Abrahams admits. "But, up until Covid, we'd happily spend four or five months not really seeing each other and then get together and tour. When we do get together, we tour, we play a lot, and we record. It's a very focused time – and then nothing."

Naturally, spending a lot of time apart means that they've each nurtured rich musical lives away from The Necks. "We've always followed our own path," says Abrahams. "We've never had any idea of exclusivity. In fact, it's really to our benefit that we spend this time apart, do all this other stuff and then every time we come back together we bring a new freshness to the thing."

Abrahams has released a number of solo albums – most recently last year's *Follower* – as well as collaborations with the likes of guitarist Mike Cooper and flautist Sabine Vogel. He's also a member of the trio Springtime, with Dirty Three drummer Jim White and guitarist Gareth Liddiard of The Drones, and plays in another trio with two more Australian musicians – multi-instrumentalist Oren Ambarchi and drummer Robbie Avenaim – whose forthcoming album *Placelessness* is due for release on Stephen O'Malley's Ideological Organ label.

Swanton's extra-curricular activities include Vazesh, a trio with Sydney based Iranian tar player Hamed Sadeghi, and saxophonist Jeremy Rose, in which they improvise in the Persian classical tradition. "In some ways, it's not unlike what The Necks do," he explains. "We just get up onstage, although in this case the rule is always that Hamed starts, mainly because of his very idiosyncratic tunings." He's also more recently been playing with Empty Voices, with Sadeghi, four horn players and Adem Yilmaz on "Eastern percussion". Due to make their debut at Sydney Festival the day after our conversation, Swanton describes them

Lloyd Swanton in Sydney, January 2023

Tony Buck in Berlin

as "more overtly a fusion of Middle Eastern music and jazz". At the same time, he's a member of Asteroid Ekosystem, a collaboration with Sydney based jazz keyboardist Alister Spence's trio and Ed Kuepper, a seminal figure in Australian punk and former member of The Saints.

Buck's solo work has seen him embrace and extend The Necks' praxis of extended duration: *Unearth* is a dense, 51 minute piece for percussion, guitar, samples and electronics released in 2017 on Room40, the Australian label that will also be releasing an as yet unfinished solo work clocking in at almost two hours. He's also a prolific collaborator and firm fixture on the European improv scene, regularly appearing at dates such as last year's Kongsberg Jazz festival where he played drums and guitar in a heavyweight quintet alongside saxophonist John Butcher, bassist Per Zanussi, cellist Lene Grenager and Pat Thomas on electronics. This month, he curates a three night residency at London's Cafe Oto in celebration of his 60th birthday last year, which will see him playing with a diverse selection of musicians including Butcher, Sonic Youth's Lee Ranaldo, The Ex guitarist Andy Moor, as well as two Berlin based artists – saxophonist Frank Gratkowski and intrepid explorer of the prepared piano, Magda Mayas. "She's a real master of playing inside the piano," he says. "We've been playing music together for 20 years now." Buck's longest standing project with Mayas is the duo Spill – and the two also perform in Das B alongside Lebanese trumpeter Mazen Kerbaj and the Berlin based Australian bass player Mike Majkowski.

Buck's foothold in Europe hasn't just given him access to a wider pool of collaborators, it's also helped The Necks build a following outside of Australia and nurture increased touring opportunities. As Swanton explains: "Tony was making a name for himself in Europe and making a lot of good contacts and, as he went along, he would often tell promoters about this band he played in in Australia. Eventually, he got in touch with Chris and me and said, 'Would you be willing to come to the other side of the world and see if anyone else likes this music?' Up until then, we'd only performed essentially once a year or so when Tony would come back to Australia for a visit. So we did that first European tour and it went wonderfully well, and our fate was sealed."

As Buck tells it, it wasn't quite that easy: "When I was living in Amsterdam, I had two bands that I was trying to do things with. One was The Necks and one was Peril, with Otomo Yoshihide playing turntables and guitar, Michael Sheridan, a guitar player from Sydney, and Kato Hideki. That band was very loud, I was playing lots of samples and stuff and it was kind of a genre-collage-clash-noise. You listen to a couple of minutes of this music and you're like, wow, this is exciting and noisy and energetic, and that was quite easy to get gigs for but, even though I was quite involved in the jazz and impro scene in Amsterdam, it took a long time for people to get The Necks. I think some people thought it was like a joke, almost – like, 'When's the intro finishing?' They didn't get it. Actually, the first people to kind of get it were the squat-punk scenes that Peril were playing in. We started to tour in this circle a bit and then slowly the impro scene and jazz people kind of embraced it a little bit – but it took a while."

While The Necks have built a career on radically rethinking the possibilities of improvised music, their roots lie firmly in jazz – and specifically in what Abrahams calls the "Sydney scene of the late 70s, early 80s". He and Buck grew up in the same suburb and had already jammed together as early as 1977–78 – and he first met Swanton in 1979 while both were attending the New South Wales Conservatorium of Music. In 1980 Abrahams and Swanton, together with tenor saxophonist Dale Barlow and drummer Louis Burdett (later replaced by Andrew Gander), formed a quartet called The Benders. "It was kind of post-Coltrane, very modal," says Abrahams. "We were very serious about it." Indeed, The Benders' serious as your life, high energy jazz achieved a modicum of success both at home and abroad, leading to three albums and some prestigious European dates. During this time, Buck was occasionally called upon to sit in on drums when Gander couldn't make a date. When The Benders broke up in 1985, Abrahams lost touch with Swanton for a year or so, and played from time to time in Buck's jazz ensemble Sketches (named for Miles Davis's *Sketches Of Spain*). Then a decisive moment came. "In 1986," Abrahams recalls, "Lloyd phoned me up and said, 'Do you want to form a trio with Tony?' I said yeah."

"We were all into modern, modal jazz at that point," he says, and it's clear that certain jazz recordings have exerted a lingering influence on The Necks' sound. Their 1999 album *Hanging Gardens*, for instance, with its implacable momentum, swishing hi-hats and grainy washes of Hammond organ, signals a deep debt to Miles's *In A Silent Way*. "Yes, for me, personally, that was a huge influence," agrees Swanton. "I hear motifs in albums we've done where I think, that's very much a reference to *In A Silent Way*. No one's consciously doing it, it's just part of our vocabulary."

Buck identifies another key jazz influence: ""My Favorite Things" – the Coltrane version, and especially, McCoy Tyner's piano solo – was a big thing, especially for Chris. It's almost like a comping solo, it goes on and on and he plays bits of the melody and just this groove that settles in with the bass and drums and it's really minimal."

Right from the beginning, this new trio was absorbing an eclectic range of sounds – and not least the cyclic repetitions of American minimalism. "*Music For 18 Musicians* by Steve Reich was a big one," Buck remembers. "We were listening to lots of different sorts of music outside of the modern jazz thing – dub reggae and African music like Fela Kuti and Indian music – but, yeah, definitely that element of Steve Reich's music was important." All these inputs were quickly transmuted into a brand new sound. "I think probably within two or three rehearsals we all kind of realised what we wanted to do," states Abrahams. "Not verbally – we never discussed it – but I think it came together very quickly. Once it was just piano, bass and drums, and the concept of 'let's all play together as a unit, and let's play a sort of music that's not about soloing so much, and it's not about premeditated composition' – once that was established, very quickly, we discovered that we really enjoyed doing it and it was new and exciting. Conceptually, this was something quite new for us and we learned how to play a particular kind of music together."

> **"I wanted to call us The Dogs. I think even dog lovers might agree that's kind of an ugly name for a band"** Lloyd Swanton

"The other thing we were interested in," Buck adds, "was how the instruments could sound together. Most of the jazz we'd been playing at the time was very boisterous, loud and forceful – and we were kind of interested in doing something different to that. So we played very soft and worked on the dynamics – things like how the cymbals would sit with the piano and how the low end would sit underneath the harmonic areas and deal with the resonances that came up with the combination of all the three instruments. That takes time and focus on details that, in the modern jazz way of playing with power and energy and virtuosity wasn't being dealt with at all. We wanted to explore something very different. "

Given their focus on delicacy and subtlety, the punkish moniker the trio settled on remains a gloriously silly and modestly self-deprecating gesture. "I think it has endured because it's almost impossible to apply any aesthetic reference to it," suggests Swanton. "It doesn't really mean anything. It doesn't go out of fashion because it was never in fashion. It was Chris's suggestion and I think it was genius." In fact, Swanton's own suggestion for the band name was along the same lines. "I wanted to call us The Dogs. I think even dog lovers might agree that that's kind of an ugly name for a band. That's kind of what I was going at. We're trying to create beauty and we're trying to be transported by this music so let's get really the opposite. Let's call it The Dogs!"

Released in 1989, The Necks' debut album – the equally provocatively named *Sex* – revealed how convincingly their concept

had taken shape. Driven by a monolithic two-note bass vamp, its single 56 minute track is a deliriously languorous groove with a louche, swinging rhythm, and splashes of overdubbed piano and percussion adding spacious texture. For all its innovation, it's clearly still very much coming out of a jazz context. "Obviously, there was baggage from having played together before," agrees Abrahams. "And there's aspects of The Necks that I can see in the tail end of what we were doing before– it wasn't just like a totally new thing."

Even so, it is undeniably radical in its quietude and insistence. In contrast to the in your face bluster of modern jazz, it proposes an enveloping atmosphere more akin to ambient music: the sort of music that can comfortably sit in the background, providing sonic weather rather than demanding undivided attention.

"We never demand that anyone listens to our pieces for the whole time they're playing," agrees Swanton. "Ambient music is definitely part of our story. When we recorded *Sex*, part of my goal was to make an album that I could listen to when I came home late at night after playing a really intense gig. I was playing a lot of pretty hard-edged jazz at the time. I would be feeling pretty wired by the intensity of the music. I didn't want classical music to listen to because that was too dramatic and so *Sex* was very much the kind of album that I found a real craving for at that time of the day."

Sex also announced a key concept that has remained absolutely central to The Necks' aesthetic both in live performance and on recordings: the idea of taking one musical idea and exploring it in great depth for an extended time. "In the first few months of the group, we would go to this room at Sydney University and play," says Abrahams. "Pretty early on we found that 45 minutes to an hour just seemed to be a natural length of time."

"45 minutes to an hour seemed to be the right amount of time to hone in on one particular piece, play it and play it... and get out before it gets boring" Tony Buck

"We were playing this kind of groove music," Buck explains, "and seeing where it would change. We just set something up and then keep doing it, and let the music suggest its changes itself. And 45 minutes to an hour seemed to be the right amount of time to hone in on one particular piece of material and play it and play it and play it and have enough changes initiated that it will end up somewhere, and appreciate that change, appreciate that sense of playing with the time, and get out before it gets boring. It was about the groove and how that plays with your sense of temporal awareness. You'd be listening for half an hour but it felt like five minutes."

What makes these extended pieces work so well is the way they glide through incremental changes so seamlessly you barely notice them happening. "If there's one thing we do really well it's blurring the edges," Swanton clarifies. The obvious analogy is that of the minute hand on a clock. Keep watching it and it doesn't seem to move. Look away, look back, and it's somewhere completely different.

"That was a huge thing, conceptually," Abrahams agrees. "We'd never really experienced that before, and the idea of something that's happening that's a collective thing that no individual is in control of, and stepping back and listening to that. I guess the way I'd made music before, it was very much someone gets up on stage and, in my case, tries to impress with what they can do and it falls into a kind of work ethic. Suddenly The Necks came along and I could see that you could actually play music and listen to what the music is doing and actually let it buoy you up and take you somewhere."

Buck, too, recognises the crucial element of listening to, and enjoying, the music as it takes place, as if somehow beyond the musicians' agency: "I almost feel like I could talk about The Necks like a fourth person, like an entity that exists outside of us. People say 'I really like The Necks' and it's like, yeah, I do too."

There are, in effect, two different manifestations of The Necks. "We decided from the very outset to never try to replicate our live experience in the studio, and vice versa. We never play anything from our albums live. I always say we're just not good enough musicians to be able to remember," Swanton quips.

"Our live performances do tend to have, as a formal aspect of them, a crescendo or a feeling of things building, whereas our studio stuff eschews that," muses Abrahams. "It's very difficult to actually record a crescendo on an album and for that to be interesting after one listen." For Buck, the distinction seems to be more about maintaining multiple avenues to expression: "I think we decided pretty early on, let's keep these two different approaches happening to create this longform music."

Seeing The Necks perform live can be a deeply moving experience. In 2019, I co-promoted a performance in a church in Brighton and I was captivated by the sense of warm intimacy they conjured in this drafty space. "We try to be adaptable," says Swanton, "but there's a certain point beyond which it's pretty hard to come to that intimacy. We've played to 1500 people in a recital hall and that feels pretty fantastic. Beyond that, I think it is starting to run the risk of being alienated from the intimacy. We opened for Nick Cave And The Bad Seeds some years ago on some Australian dates and they were big crowds – 5000, or 10,000 people. We played what we call 'stadium Necks'. It's a different way of playing."

Certainly, it's hard to imagine 'stadium Necks' evoking the same hushed intensity I witnessed in the church, the pin-drop frailty of a cymbal slowly decaying in near silence. "I love the way that The Necks can recalibrate the listener – which includes ourselves – to that level of intimacy," agrees Swanton. "The very first public show we ever did was in a little school house on the grounds of Sydney University and we performed round about sunset, completely acoustically, to a full room of about 110 people – although several thousand people now claim to have been there – and we decided to play without any lights on. It was still daylight when we started. The sun started setting, the birds outside went mad, which was totally woven into the music we were playing, we did one piece and by halfway through the piece the whole room was in pitch darkness. We couldn't see the audience and they couldn't see us and yet everyone's sitting listening to this music."

Equally important in their performances are the sounds the room itself can make – the unpredictable resonances and frequencies created by the acoustic architecture of the space. "I hear them as sort of sonic collisions," says Swanton. "Chris put it incredibly well in an interview a few years ago – he said, 'Sometimes I'm playing something on the piano and I can hear it's triggering a sound in the room and so I start really working on that and the more I do it the more it's creating a kind of a feedback within the room, but a controlled feedback, and then I decide to stop playing that and it keeps going and I realise it was never me doing it in the first place.' I totally know that experience. Who is making that sound?"

"Sometimes there's a kind of standing wave in the room," observes Buck. "If it's a problem, we can avoid it, but if it's kind of cool, we can really exploit it and head towards it. These sounds can really influence how things unfold."

Of course, in a recording studio, this kind of spontaneous audio event is simply not going to happen. "Most studios are designed to eradicate any kind of troublesome frequencies," says Swanton. "And yet they're the things that in our live show we're going to home in on and actually try to accentuate and turn into something really interesting. So, a lot of the elements to take for granted in a live performance room have to be added electronically."

Drawing on their early immersion in dub reggae, The Necks' studio albums employ imaginative overdubs, dropping in and chopping out extra organ swirls, arco bass drones and flights of percussion into the flow of the music. "With digital recording," Swanton continues, "we don't even have to allocate a particular point in the piece for a motif. We can decide in the mix if it comes at the start, the middle or the end or is a recurrent motif. It's really blurring the lines between composition, recording and improvising. It's a combination of all three."

Chris Abrahams in Sydney

Album titles are something The Necks take seriously. "One of our albums took 18 months to name," Abrahams reveals. "It has to be something that feels right. It's very hard to explain."

With that in mind, it's tempting to interpret the name of the trio's latest album *Travel* as an oblique reference to a curtailed touring schedule. While an Australian tour will take place in May and June this year, they're taking an indefinite break from international touring due to family and age-related health issues. Maybe that's also why *Travel* is a concerted effort to reconcile the two incarnations of The Necks, and bring some of their live energy into the studio. "These tracks mark a middle ground," confirms Abrahams, "representative of pieces we could play live."

With only minimal post-production added, *Travel* certainly feels like much less of a studio confection. "The idea was a well-recorded version of where we were at live at the moment," says Buck. "Then, without spending too much time, one person might overdub something like a Hammond organ or a tambourine, and we would just mix it, not dub mix it and pull things in and out like we do with the studio recording."

Travel can be seen as a companion piece to 2017s *Unfold*: both are double LPs which move away from the familiar hour-long pieces, each presenting instead four sidelong tracks averaging around 20 minutes. The reasoning is partly pragmatic: while The Necks' earlier releases coincided with the advent of CDs, allowing longer tracks to be presented in full, these shorter improvisations cater to the resurgent vinyl market. But it's also clear that The Necks have enjoyed working to this self-imposed restriction, recording these jams during a week in the studio while also working on a longer piece for future release. What's more, taken together, they seem to represent the arc of The Necks' musical evolution. The infectious groove of "Signal" feels like something the late 80s version of The Necks could have come up with: based around a fat, insistent bassline, and riding irrepressible rim-shots, its wistful piano flurries are augmented by a minimal organ lick that suggests a subliminal reggae skank.

"Everything in the group has taken a long time. We were in there for the long haul. We've incrementally moved forward over the years" Chris Abrahams

The album's other tracks highlight some of the more exploratory approaches The Necks have adopted over the years as they've moved away from the more obvious groove-based feel. "Bloodstream" brews a thick cloud from bowed double bass and a lofty church organ, over which Buck spits fizzing, sustained snare rolls and elemental crashes of cymbal and booming tom. "Forming" is a suspenseful mirage of piano ripples and shimmering organ, with chattering bells and shakers building up to a bludgeoning floor tom rumble. "Imprinting" sounds like Sun Ra sitting in with Sunburned Hand Of The Man, layering ethereal synth and earthy electric piano squiggles over lumbering bass murk while Buck taps out a pow-wow with shells and bells on his loose-skinned floor tom.

At their best, these tracks feel like mysteriously multilayered puzzles following several different fractured logics. "Tony will be playing four tempos at once and I won't necessarily be basing my piano playing on what he's doing – but somehow we make it whole," reflects Abrahams.

"It's like a number of different malfunctioning machines that all phase with each other but they still come around so you still recognise that there are these patterns," agrees Buck. "Everything I do in The Necks is based on cycles. If somebody in the band is playing a particular tempo and a particular pulse, I don't have to join that. It gives a sort of freedom. It's fantastic locking in with somebody and playing in the pocket but, at the same time, to find other pockets where you can overlap with these different cycles happening at the same time can be even more trance-inducing and even more powerful."

Clearly Buck has brought to The Necks much from his activities away from the trio. "This more abstract, timbral-based improvised music that I tend to do a lot in Europe – that's an interesting thing to bring into the group because, in a way, some of it's quite different to this cyclic, constant, ambient thing that we do with The Necks – almost diametrically opposed. I've spent some time trying to reconcile those two things within the concept of The Necks."

Citing "Mosquito" from 2004's *Mosquito/See Through* as his breakthrough, he adds: "I really kind of got this pointillistic approach within the cyclic, minimal thing. What might have been a sprinkling of acoustic percussive colours like I might overdub over the top of the groove, that became the colour of the whole thing and is maintained through the whole record."

Reflecting on The Necks' evolution from grooves to abstract, polycyclic layers, Abrahams remarks: "It's taken a long time for that to happen, but everything in the group has taken a long time. We were in there for the long haul. We've incrementally moved forward over the years." In this respect, it's not hard to see The Necks' entire history unfolding much like one of their improvisations. "Yes," agrees Swanton, "in a way, the career is the long form of the music."

"We don't push the music, we don't push the band," Abrahams adds.

"We've never been a band that has tried to force ourselves past our comfort level," Swanton concludes. "What's the secret of our success? Low ambition." ○

The Necks's *Travel* is released by Northern Spy

Bill Meyer maps the many solo ventures and side projects spinning out of the orbit of The Necks

Chris Abrahams
Memory Night
Room40 CD 2013

Chris Abrahams recorded his first solo album *Piano* a few years before The Necks' late 1980s debut, but his solo career didn't really get rolling until the 21st century, during which he has made nine more. *Memory Night* consists of auditory collages that thrive on tensions between sources and states. Conventionally played keyboards, mostly electronic, abut shuddering inside-piano work, guitar noise and sampled cries of flying foxes on four lengthy pieces that evoke psychic interiors, outdoor environments and broken digital vistas.

Chris Abrahams & Mike Cooper
Praxis
Room40 DL 2020

Abrahams was born in New Zealand and guitarist Mike Cooper in the UK. While two decades separate their birthdays, they share the formative experience of having moved to Australia during their respective childhoods, and that's where they began performing together in 2006. *Praxis*, their most recent album, was recorded at a Sydney gig in 2017. During that tour, Cooper travelled light, playing an iPhone steel guitar app and borrowed guitars, in this case one belonging to Abrahams. The keyboardist confined himself to synthesizer, and the sound language is resolutely digital, a vertiginous slanging match of stutters, blips, echoing beats and the occasional disembodied slide guitar lick.

Tony Buck
Unearth
Room40 CD 2017

Tony Buck is arguably The Necks' most distinctive instrumentalist. His drumming isn't simply a source of rhythm, texture and energy; he shapes multiple streams of sound from a collection of little instrumentals into purposefully evolving sonic environments. *Unearth* augments the quadridexterity and longform imagination he brings to the group with a myriad of sound sources to realise and sustain one such milieu. It lasts for 51 minutes but invites the listener to live within it again and again.

Tony Buck/Anja Lauvdal/Ståle Liavik Solberg
Gemstones
Hæverk Industrier LP 2020

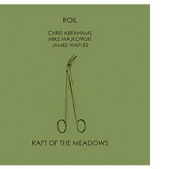
The Necks are multi-instrumentalists in the studio, but this trio specifically recruited Buck to play guitar. Norwegian keyboardist Anja Lauvdal and percussionist Ståle Liavik Solberg initially asked him to join them for an improvised set at the 2018 Blow Out festival in Oslo, and then carried on with a few more pre-pandemic encounters. This LP opens with a dubby space-out, and then atomises into rustling, free improvisation. In either mode, Buck's scrabbling attack and acidic feedback are galvanising forces.

the catholics
Ambon
Bugle 2xCD 2015

Of the three Necks, bassist Lloyd Swanton cleaves closest to mainstream jazz when he's away from the group. But the name of his long-running ensemble, the catholics, telegraphs his belief that it is a hybrid music; the combo relies heavily on rhythms that originate in various warm parts of the world. *Ambon* is Swanton's most ambitious effort. It takes the diary kept surreptitiously by his uncle, a POW who did not survive the Second World War, as a jumping off point for adventures into Pacific Island string music, Christian hymns, and an adaptation of free improvisation's engagement with disassembled instruments to evoke the rubbish heap resources available to the prisoners.

Magda Mayas/Tony Buck/John Butcher
Glints
Ni-Vu-Ni-Connu LP 2022

Outside of The Necks, Buck's most enduring musical partnership is with pianist Magda Mayas in the duo Spill. On *Glints*, they join forces with saxophonist John Butcher to dive unreservedly into a realm of unconventional techniques, quick reactions and stern self-restraint. The three musicians achieve a collective compositional mindset that makes the music feel simultaneously unstable and inevitable.



ROIL
Raft Of The Meadows
No Business LP 2014

Like The Necks, ROIL are an improvising piano-bass-drums trio with Chris Abrahams at the keys. But along with two different players, double bassist Mike Majkowski and drummer James Waples, comes a philosophical dissimilarity – they're much more likely to pull a tune apart and then move on. This LP contains six tracks across two sides, a feat of pith that The Necks are unlikely to pull off, and within each, there's a willingness to shift quickly from muted melody to full boil. In this more volatile setting, Abrahams remains the guy who is willing to nurture a tune as his partners will allow.

Spill
Mycelium
Corvo LP 2022

Over 20 years working together as Spill, Buck and Magda Mayas have developed an improvisation-based methodology that admits both slow-growing evolution and quick, sometimes violent changes of course into uncluttered, open spaces. On their fifth album as a duo, they are especially attentive to contrasts of texture, such as the drizzle of pure chimes over distorted electric and prepared acoustic pianos on "Patina".

15 Tracks That Buzz & Whirr

Romance
"Once Upon A Time" (Ecstatic)

Carmen Villain
"Subtle Bodies" (Smalltown Supersound)

Slikback
"F-22" (No label)

Floating Shrine
"Hermit" (Decaying Spheres)

Madeleine Cocolas
"And Then I Watch It Fall Apart" (Room40)

Mystic AM
"The Conjuring" (Astral Industries)

The Black Dog
"Sensor" (Dust Science)

Porter Ricks
"Nautical Zone" (Type)

Joachim Spieth
"Terrain 3" (Affin Ltd)

Ulla
"sad face" (3XL)

Yuto Takei
"Neo Yokohama" (Maloca)

Lucy Gooch
"Sun" (Past Inside The Present)

GAS
"Narkopop 5" (Kompakt)

JJ + JS
"Meshing" (Daisart)

Burial
"Streetlands" (Hyperdub)

Compiled by Tero Parviainen, ctpt.co

Women From Space 15

Nicole Mitchell & Fabio Paolizzo
Medusae (Don Giovanni)

White Boy Scream
Hustle Divine (Hanged Man)

Lotte Anker
Live At The Loft (ILK)

Judith Berkson
Liederkreis (B Walter)

Coco Elysses/Ben LaMar Gay/Carlos Pride
Resurrection Suite (Rhythm Testament)

Gayle Young
As Trees Grow (Farpoint)

Christine Duncan/Jean Martin/DB Boyko
Idiolalla (Ambiances Magnetiques)

Aiyun Huang
Memory In Motion: Percussion In Surround (Mode)

Yang Chen
*longing for_* (people | places)

c_RL
Friends (No label)

Yunjin Claire Lee
Voluntary Response (No label)

Karen Ng
Here (No label)

Heidi Chan
Matsuri Maximal (No label)

Pursuit Grooves
Mo:Delic Island (Pursuit Grooves)

Diane Roblin
Life Force (No label)

Compiled by Bea Labikova, Women From Space festival, womenfromspace.com

Skyline Tapes 15

netbooks.WRLD
ENDLESS STAIRCASE (Skyline Tapes)

amber dregs
contrails (Skyline Tapes)

coniumer
Acedia & Anomie (Maulcat)

Bagel Fanclub
How Are Your Cars Driving? (Maulcat)

Death's Dynamic Shroud
Darklife (100% Electronica)

Death's Dynamic Shroud
Heavy Black Heart (Orange Milk)

Yabujin
Early Works Bootleg (dismiss yourself)

d'Eon
LP (Hippos In Tanks)

James Ferraro
Far Side Virtual (Hippos In Tanks)

Games
That We Can Play (Hippos In Tanks)

Chuck Person
Chuck Person's Eccojams Vol 1 (The Curatorial Club)

Oneohtrix Point Never
Garden Of Delete (Warp)

Macintosh Plus
Floral Shoppe (Beer On The Rug)

Porcupine Tree
Deadwing (Lava)

Dream Theater
Images And Words (ATCO)

Compiled by Isaac Koehn, Skyline Tapes, skylinetapes.bandcamp.com

The Office Ambience

Elsa Bergman
Playon Crayon (Bergman Inspelningar)

Rex Casswell
Musicking (Scatter)

The CIA
Surgery Channel (In The Red)

Gerald Cleaver/Brandon Lopez/Hprizm
In The Wilderness (Positive Elevation/577)

Kate Fagan
I Don't Wanna Be Too Cool (Captured Tracks)

Mayssa Jallad
Marjaa: The Battle Of The Hotels (Ruptured)

Lia Kohl
The Ceiling Reposes (American Dreams)

Laibach
Love Is Still Alive (Mute)

Dorothy Moskowitz & The United States Of Alchemy
Under An Endless Sky (Tompkins Square)

Mudhoney
Plastic Eternity (Sub Pop)

OPLA
GTI (Pointless Geometry)

Patten
Mirage FM (555-5555)

Rangers
Curiosities 2017–2021 (Bandcamp)

Max Syedtollan
Disposables (33-33)

Television
Double Exposure (No label)

Compiled from the playlists of *Wire* staff. To hear a stream of our Office Ambience, go to thewire.co.uk. We welcome charts from record shops, radio shows, DJs, venues, labels, musicians, readers, etc. Email a top 15 to charts@thewire.co.uk – the more unusual the better

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Lukas Wenninger

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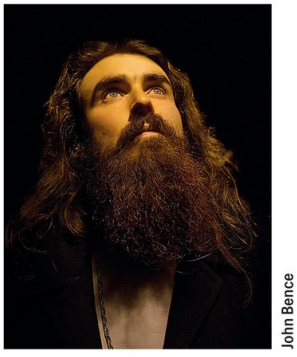

John Bence

Ken Street (Meemo Comma); Roger op den Camp (Laibach); Amelia Gilmartin (Bence)

Soundcheck A–Z

New CDs, vinyl, downloads, streams

Avola
Psykor
SIGE DL/MC
In 2021, Veronica Avola travelled from hometown Portland, Oregon to her birthplace of Rapallo, Italy in order to help sort through the belongings of her recently deceased grandmother. During the trip, she collected a variety of sounds, most notably the ambience of her relative's empty apartment and recordings from the funeral. While this sense of moribundity seeps through *Psykor*'s nine pieces, there remains the colossal crunch and grind present in all of her previous work.

"Beast Belly" and "Cave Rave" opt for low caustic drone and simmering emotional seethe, which eventually erupts on "Daddy Loves ET". Rather than leaning into the obvious melancholy which underpins the album's creation, that energy is supercharged into something which registers somewhere between rage and regret. This might be due, at least in part, to the fact that Avola's parent and grandparent were estranged, but these pieces are filled with the kind of helpless anger that goes alongside feelings of loss, such as the sinewy and glitchy "Entry Level Bog (Saikor Remix)", which bounces around like an emotion trying to escape through fingers clenched into a fist.

If it sounds like Avola has made a depressive album, that's not really the case. Closing track "In The Mourning" gets closest to that darkness, an introspective wash of twinkling synths which arc towards something more bleak. Mostly, though, these pieces are driven by brute power. "Brain Worm" scatters skittering beats through pillars of ominous boom, while "Aural Spackling Compound" drops stacks of muscular pummel onto paranoid, infernal electronics.

It's reasonable to expect that channelling such delicate subject matter via growl and heft might sidetrack the emotive impact or blunt it on a churning, grinding edge. Avola manages to channel the death of an estranged family member and the subsequent emotional journey into a set of pieces finely balanced between introspection and loud, aggressive catharsis.
Spenser Tomson

John Bence
Archangels
Thrill Jockey DL/LP
Bristol based composer John Bence approaches his work with a grave attitude and a grand vision, making allusions to huge, unknowable concepts exemplified by the titles of his projects. His 2018 *Kill* EP was genuinely terrifying, a gripping work for voice, percussion, electronics and prepared instruments that told the story of a murderer receiving judgment from God. 2020's *Love* transposed *Kill*'s highly strung mood to solo piano, for a nakedly emotional sequence of compositions reflecting on Bence's experience of alcoholism.

At first, *Archangels* seems in keeping with the drama of Bence's previous work, opening with some ominous scene setting that amalgamates piano, chanting and field recordings of ambulance sirens. In its interweaving piano line and brutal percussion "Metatron, Archangel Of Kether" points to Bence returning to his roots in classical composition via the harsh noise experiments of his recent work. This mode makes a welcome return towards the end of the album, on the cacophonous "The Sun" and "Anu/Enlil/Enki (The Way Of Anu)" – but before this, there's a rough mid-album dip of uncharacteristically sentimental piano and a number of frankly unremarkable works for voice. A major element of "Kamael, Archangel Of Geburah" is a recording of church bells, unforgivably literal on an album explicitly about spirituality, and something of a deflation considering the intended gravitas of such a project.

Most of these tracks are named after Jewish and Christian archangels, but there are also references to Hindu gods, Kabbalah and the Tarot. Bence also acknowledges the inspiration of a book intended to help with the channelling of angels – *Angels And Archangels: A Magician's Guide* by Damien Echols (best known as one of the West Memphis Three, the trio of youths convicted of murder in 1994 and later released) – which could be read as a bit self-help corny, considering some of the resulting music. Perhaps it's because of this generalised approach to spirituality that *Archangels* often feels lacking in commitment and the degree of narrative conviction that characterised Bence's previous work.
Claire Biddles

Douglas Benford/Blanca Regina/Manuela Barczewski/Steve Beresford
Plays LemonMelons
Bandcamp DL
Douglas Benford/Adrian Northover/Isidora Edwards
Taking A Quiet Road
Bandcamp DL
Douglas Benford
Lost In A Cold Meadow
Lonely Impulse Collective DL
Douglas Benford is the only person I know for whom "On your bike!" is a request for an encore. There's what sounds like the ting of a bicycle bell on one of the improvisations on *Plays LemonMelons*, a set of improvisations made to graphic scores/texts at the Hundred Years Gallery in Hoxton, London, and it's a reminder how assiduously Benford has sought out new ways of making sound that make no reference whatever to any canonical instrumentation or musical style.

Only Sylvia Hallett has made more effective use of the bike as a sound source. What further associations it has for Benford – who doesn't go in for abstract theory – isn't clear, but the most democratic mode of transport is also one of the most transient. It approaches silently and is past you and gone in a moment, with maybe a rung warning to jaywalkers and wool-gatherers. In her dotage, all Iris Murdoch could remember was cycling around Oxford. Her husband John Bayley used to paint a faintly fantastical image of her floating silently behind a hedge. This somehow makes sense of Benford's music, which is as interesting for its gaps and silences, its non-machine sounds and its utterly unidiomatic language-net as for any guiding logic. The loveliest of the pieces here is the short *Lost In A Cold Meadow*, made under the auspices of Lonely Music Collective who, since confined to private spaces since Covid, had started to create solo materials with only a mayfly's existence online; up for a week, then taken down. The beauty of Benford's piece is that it has already gone. It's so much easier to recall an experience you have no chance of reproducing.

The longer pieces with Beresford are more dramatic, but within the same proviso. He makes his puckish presence felt on "Ahoy" and, with just Blanca Regina, on "D Below A", where her nicely accented English lends the spoken part a mysterious and evanescent quality. Benford's duet with Manuela Barczewski on "Beginning With A New Fold" begins with soft guitar chords and what sounds like a warm-up or soundcheck vocal. Perversely, it's the randomised bell rings that become the structuring principle of a song that, over more than 24 minutes, essentially remains static.

That might be the guiding philosophy of Benford's music. We've used it many times as a mild rebuke to improvisors who may start out with interesting ideas, but never go anywhere with them. Benford quite deliberately never goes anywhere. It makes not a lick of sense to think of any of these pieces having a destination or an unfolding drama. That might be belied by the title of *Taking The Quiet Road* with Adrian Northover and Isidora Edwards, which implies a journey. When a bell rings and its decay is held on "Ahead Of Time", it's clear that both time and location are suspended. The next hour passes in a quietly rapt way, comfortably absorbed and absorbing.
Brian Morton

Florence Cats
Ys
Edições CN DL/MC
The debut album from Belgian composer and artist Florence Cats opens with "Sunken Cathedral", an intimate interpretation of Claude Debussy's piano prelude *La Cathédrale Engloutie*. As the opening notes leave the

The high altitude field recordings of Philip Samartzis document the stress and strain of a world in environmental peril

By Richard Thomas

The iceman cometh: Philip Samartzis

Philip Samartzis
Atmospheres & Disturbances
Room40 CD+Pbk/DL

Philip Samartzis's *Atmospheres & Disturbances* is an electro-acoustic composition based on field recordings made at the High Altitude Research Station in Jungfraujoch, Switzerland. Perched 3500 meters above sea level in the Alps, the research station performs an important service for all living species on this planet in that its principal area of research is climate change analysis.

These recordings exude an extremely cold, formidable quality. One of the many interesting aspects is that Samartzis also documents the impact of weather systems upon the structures of the research centre. Sometimes this sounds belligerent, sometimes benign. We hear the strangely comforting yet threatening howls and shrieks of gale force wind and other malevolent elements battering the metal clad infrastructure juxtaposed with the sweet, tinkling hard bop complexity of trickling water. Or the enjoyably musical jangle of metal cylinders in a gale – an Alpine gamelan of steel and ice.

These moments are occasionally disturbed by people and machines external to the research station. A helicopter, mysterious electronic buzzes, the hoot of a train whistle, a human chanting something or other in the landscape, service announcements at the local railway station. In spite of this, throughout these recordings we have no real sense of the research centre as a social space. We do not hear anything of the feelings and opinions of the people who work there. We have no sense of their professional lives or their inner lives. They are phantoms.

What must it be like to live and work in an environment so inhospitable that it may as well be the surface of the Moon, Mars or Antarctica? One might be drawn to ask questions, such as: do these singular people dream and have nightmares about? Do they get bored, frightened, depressed, worried? What do they do for fun? What are their names? Where are they from? How did they get there? What do they actually do and why? What are the socio-economic conditions of their working lives really like? What do their voices sound like?

We also hear nothing of the acoustic ambience of the actual place in which these people live and work. Yes, we hear the gargantuan drama of weather systems knocking seven shades of shit out of the exterior hull of their workplace, but we do not hear the sound of their offices and labs, their living quarters, or the equipment they use for research. Perhaps it is because such environments are seemingly undramatic and deemed boring to listen to, and that this sequence of recordings is concerned with the overtly dramatic – a work of oppositions and conflict. The title of the project makes that clear. It could be said then that this is a theatrical work.

How does Samartzis fit in to all this as an actor, as a human with agency? We don't hear him. We only hear what he decides to listen to and record. He is a ghost haunting a research station high in the Alps, or a medium absorbing and and transmitting the cosmic petrochemical impact of spectral corporations that slowly but surely shove the planet into the ebb of a tide of death. But as much as Samartzis's intention is to examine the direct physical impact of climate change and the transformation of the landscape, he is also transforming that auditory landscape and musicalising it.

So any sense of what that environment is really like is obscured by compositional gestures. This, by extension, creates a distance between the listener and the core conceptual components of the project: location and climate change. Those living in an urban environment can only really get close to space and nature when they are mediated; we can only listen to a blizzard when it has been fixed and contained within a sound recording. Once this force of nature is sanitised, we can hear it as if it were music. This is also expedient – if it gets too fierce, too hostile, too much of a challenge, we can always press pause or stop and listen to something else.

So, what is happening here is anthropomorphic. We impose the conditions of music upon nature. Something that is anything but music yet which is nonetheless audible. Nature from places that we perceive to be mysterious, exotic, remote, extreme. Places that we will never visit, but we know that humans have visited and, in some circumstances, places we know humans and other animals and microbacterial organisms actually dwell. Places that are imaginable to us but unknowable all the same.

Those humans that visit these places and report back, sound recordists in this case, become proxies for us. Their ears become our ears. Perhaps that is it. We want to listen to someone else listening so we don't have to. But be wary – get ready for ruin, get ready to flee when your house is on fire, under six feet of water, or frozen solid. ○

Philip Samartzis

piano, it's not the instrument's reverberations nor Debussy's allusive motifs that take the spotlight. Instead, attention is drawn to the rawness of the recording, the ambience of Cats's room and the noises of her clothes.

Through sections of gently ascending chords and stabs evocative of church bells, the composer and performer's artistic voices exist on equal footing, one embracing the other. The brushing of fingers over piano keys, the resounding cluck of pedals, the rhythm of breathing and soft vocalisations become integral parts of the composition, woven into an understated lo-fi aesthetic that stands in juxtaposition with Debussy's impressions of imposing spaces.

Cats's penchant for absorbing moods and environmental noise into music is even more prominent on the remaining pieces. On "Fall Call" her DIY theremin responds to a passing thunderstorm by belching a sub-bass rumble that rises into the sound of a stuttering engine and jet-like sweeps. Then, a phone rings, perhaps on purpose.

Meanwhile, the closing "Drop Out" would be a pristine forest field recording, if not for Cats's wistful, absent-minded humming that lands like a leaf among crackling trees and chirping birds to complete a sonically disparate but conceptually and emotionally resounding album.

Antonio Poscic

Decolonise Your Mind Society
A Second Invitation To An Uninterrupted Katabatic Lens
Hunnia DL/LP

Graphic designer Csenge Csató's cover art offers a suitably illuminated welcome to listeners who take up the latest invitation from these upliftingly off-kilter Hungarian musicians led by guitarist, composer and instrument builder Bálint Szabó. Mysterious figures climb from their subterranean homes, and move through a lustrously coloured landscape, where fried eggs are dotted inexplicably among gigantic plants. A huge serpent emerges from soil in which dinosaur bones are embedded. Strange angular birds flutter overhead. Scaly mountain peaks resemble the caps of psilocybin mushrooms.

Csató is providing an orientation, or disorientation, as she did for the group's debut release, *A Courteous Invitation To An Uninhabited Anabatic Prism*. The music, like the imagery, skews what is familiar, tilting addictive riffs and infectiously simple melodies to a harmonically oblique angle where a surreal title, such as "How I Learnt To Fly In A Dove's Dream", seems entirely reasonable. Unconventional tunings and insistent grooves steer the ear beyond routine horizons, and perform hallucinatory tricks. Decolonise Your Mind Society are metrically astute, but they avoid unnecessary complication and superfluous flourishes. Their departures from orthodox temperament are often startling, yet consistently purposeful. The world heard through their music's lens may seem warped in relation to Eurocentric norms, but it never sounds arcane or frivolously decorative.

Emphasis during their previous outing fell on ascent (anabasis) towards the light and ecstatic jangle of higher overtones. Here Szabó and his fellow explorers undertake their descent (katabasis), at times moving with dirge-like slowness, but mostly clinging to the funky chop and churn of embodied trance music. In his review of their debut in *The Wire* 441, Daniel Spicer provided a wide-ranging catalogue of other musics brought to mind by the group's choice of tunings and global sensibility. On this sequel, Decolonize Your Mind Society are moving persuasively though their own exhilarating territory.

Julian Cowley

Emænuel
The Night Skin Lives
Scorpio Red DL/LP/MC

Emænuel is a bit of an enigma. Last year, the Nigerian born artist released his debut album *Sukistan* to mild fanfare, but the record's sleevenotes revealed little about the artist himself besides the fact that the record was conceived in Kolkata, a self-professed "exercise in self-immolation".

The Night Skin Lives is a soundtrack to "the city's space in the darkest hours". Which city is anyone's guess, but this record by an artist from just north of the equator speaks to the dissociative chill that settles in the dark corners of the world's increasingly homogenised cityscapes.

At 12 tracks and over an hour long, *The Night Skin Lives* requires a bit of patience, like a Wang Bing film. Similar to Wang's landmark *West Of The Tracks,* there's an overwhelming sense of industrial decay transmitted via whirrs, drones and repetitive rhythms on this record. A rumbling bass drone in "Breathless" acts as a prelude to urban somnambulism, punctuated by fits and starts of distortion. "Lost Voices" brings an erratic broken beat, shot through with undulating hi-hats and hiss – it's Emænuel's most danceable work yet. Halfway through, an auratic synth brings the track from the urban underbelly to a celestial night sky. "Tempered" floats at this zenith, ambient swells propelled by airy contrails of noise and Tim Hecker-esque clouds of synth.

These moments of sonic astral projection are punctuated by ritualistic hypnotism in tracks like "Warring" and "Cackled", which develop their rhythms in patient 16-bar increments. "Resurrected" contains both, the first five minutes of the track trundling along before evaporating in a lycanthropic haze, pitch delay turning synth into what sounds like the howl of a wolf.

James Gui

Beatriz Ferreyra
Senderos De Luz Y Sombras
Ina GRM DL/LP

Beatriz Ferreyra has been composing music for 60 years and her work has retained a sense of playfulness and freshness. Her second great passion all this time has been astrophysics. The walls of Ferreyra's home are lined with shelves crammed with books on either astrophysics or music, and the two disciplines blend together nowhere more harmoniously than this latest vinyl release *Senderos De Luz Y Sombras* (*Paths Of Light And Shadows*). She is also a painter and one of her abstract landscapes features on the cover.

It is a 30 minute piece in two movements, originally commissioned as a 16-channel performance at MPAA Paris in January 2017, released digitally in 2022, remixed in stereo and now available on vinyl. With whining creatures, unintelligible whisperings, sirens, swells, celestial shimmerings, it is more tuneful and accessible than previous works – but Ferreyra's music is free from ambient cosmic cliche. Layers of sustained musique concrète continuously fold over and into each other, opening into the reverberance of an outer space littered with thermal atmospheric tides that percussively torque passing planets and stars off their synchronous orbits.

What stands out in Ferreyra's music is that all her sound sources are derived from processed recordings of various objects or environments. She avoids electronic instruments. Techniques for intricate, dynamic spatialisation are at the heart of all her work and, even in stereo, the sounds appear to move through full 360 degree trajectories. Spatialisation is obviously more subtle in a 16-channel acousmatic multi-loudspeaker live performance, but Ina/GRM have mastered the stereo mix-down and provide a convincing reproduction (especially with surround headphones if you have them).

The piece was composed in memoriam of Bernard Parmegiani, Ferreyra's friend and mentor from early GRM days, and Bernard Baschet, inventor of the Baschet glass keyboard instruments or sculptures sonores, which she has often used as source material. Perhaps that explains the somewhat gentler combining of sounds here, especially in the second movement, where an overwhelming sense of being at peace with the world prevails.

Jo Hutton

Fragile States
Various
New Weird Australia DL

New Weird Australia's 30th compilation is an eclectic collection of ambient, experimental and electronic works seeking to soundtrack the atmospheres of "our perilous times". Accompanying information explains how the 25 tracks curated and sequenced by label founder Stuart Buchanan engage with ambient aesthetics that aren't passive and blank, but rather active, engaged and possessing a point of view – "conscious ambience" in "lockstep with our social and political malaise".

Fragile States features an exciting cross section of emerging and established Australian talent, including among others Freya Berkhout, Chloë Sobek, Timothy Fairless, Hantu (Isobel D'Cruz), Mookoid (Mick Lampert), Silonics (Gary McKie), ilex (Holly Conner), Nina Buchanan and Bradfield Dumpleton.

The set opens with Madeleine Cocolas's "Exhale 86", a cold softness unfurling from the fog with breaths on top of widening synth drones, the pitch a slow creeping tide, an ever-tightening screw. JWPaton's "Clearcut" groans with rhythms grinding on rusted hinges, a sound slowly subsumed by scorching distortion. Third Space's "Dowlais" is both crystalline and agitated, with glass-toned

drones glinting behind frenetic beats, an impossible distance between foreground and horizon. The churn and pull of reversed tones on Puscha's "The Heathens Who Long For Night, Not To Be Forgotten" feels like standing in the grip of a receding ocean wave. On "Bodies Stretched Beyond The Mediant", James Hazel allows weary acoustic drones to sag and sink into microtonal shifts.

Melancholy atmospherics are punctuated by moments of charming weirdness – Okuesha Kills's sweetly manic "Version 1", the rubbery, uncanny unreality of Alsi's "When You Touch Me, I See Visions". Tracks like Melanie Velarde's "Donuts" and K Wilson's "Open Palm" tap into a dreamy kind of loneliness. Another standout is Sallvage's "Gaguru Revenant", a heightened field recording featuring kookaburra calls, the hiss of insects and possibly something ominous lurching in the shadows.

Leah Kardos

Glassine & Sam Haberman
Radial
Cached Media CD/DL

The grand tradition of stirring collaborative ventures between Baltimore based outsider musicians – Reverse Baptism, Wzt Hearts and Dog Leather, among many others – persists with *Radial*. After capturing field recordings and weaving sound swatches, Horse Lords drummer Sam Haberman handed them to Danny Greenwald, who operates as Glassine, for processing and manipulation; the duo further massaged the material in the studio.

The results, created between 2020–22, are gentle and bold and brief, somehow effortless, a hypnotic, feathery ambient that verges on the vaporous but never quite gets there. This is the sort of album that seems impossible while it's playing, demanding an immediate, repeat appraisal; it's a different experience from Horse Lords' tricky post-rock and the Guitar Center-sourced, glistening beat bliss Greenwald got up to on 2015's *No Stairway*.

"St Pete" shifts from swampy sequelches into a soft, thin cloud of swells and chimes. "Up, Together, Reach" whirls from balm to tornado to glitched fugue state to what sounds like a hallucinating cricket. "Brushes In Woodstock" appears to remix clank and clunk of pebbles rattling around in a sonorous glass bottle. The felicitous "One Armful Of Groceries" is the aural equivalent of a Jackson Pollock action painting dripping, splatting and splotching into being. Blue synthesizers and slag-pooled vocals, scrunched and stretched, make "Grandma Phyllis" gorgeous and uneasy; it's like listening to early Mogwai underwater.

A kaleidoscopic tonal hall of mirrors, the adroit "Laura's Place" initially posits early childhood as a wonderland of play and possibility – until a dark, densely threshed denouement reminds us, anew, that innocence

Dorothy Moskowitz & The United States Of Alchemy
Under An Endless Sky
Tompkins Square CD/DL

Under An Endless Sky is the result of a collaboration between Italian composer Francesco Paolo Paladino, lyricist and author Luca Chino Ferrari and singer Dorothy Moskowitz. In addition to her stint in Country Joe's All Star Band, Moskowitz is best known for being the lead vocalist of The United States Of America, a short-lived but highly influential Los Angeles based music group she co-founded with experimental composer Joseph Byrd in 1967.

The United States Of America's sole self-titled 1968 LP is considered a landmark of the psychedelic era. Festooned with electronic noise, spatial effects and surreal musique concrète excursions, the group eschewed guitars in favour of synthesizers to create a futuristic version of psych rock. They made pioneering use of ring modulation to augment Moskowitz's pristine voice, giving her cool delivery an uncanny, otherworldly edge. All of this context is relevant, since *Under An Endless Sky* makes some references to The United States Of America, not only via the trio's adapted band name, but sonically, musically and in cosmic creative spirit.

Like The United States Of America's vision of rock without the guitars, here we also find a commitment to non-standard instrumentation. No guitars, bass or drums were used, only "virtual sounds... upon which are grafted some acoustic interventions". This comes in the form of violins, violas, percussion and woodwinds in addition to (what sound like) field recordings. Paladino's musical textures are grounded by drones and layered, oscillating rhythmic figures that collide and converge in a style reminiscent of the always shifting minimalism of Terry Riley's *In C*, in places also evoking something of the ornate, busy yet meditative quality of his 1980 album *Shri Camel*. At the age of 83, Moskowitz's voice has naturally been transformed by time, though there is a clarity and warmth of feeling that is familiar, heightened by the presence of the familiar ring modulation effect applied to her vocal. Ferrari's lyrics are poetic and existential, a great match for Moskowitz's earthy, modal melodies and prayer-like incantations.

The album opens with the title track, almost 24 minutes long. Droning organ and accordion patterns jostle for space while up above Moskowitz sings wistfully of *"obscure cosmic mystery"*. The musical backing is an awkward but beautiful mess, like a bag of wriggling kittens. Eventually the quality transforms from a small cacophony to something more transcendent as heartfelt strings emerge in trilling ensemble. As she sings *"Here in the lightness of dawn, where perfume awakens the senses and shivers run through the body"*, the music feels almost spiritually energised, a cluster of glowing, pulsing embers.

Grinding distortion and amplified pizzicato gives way to heavy ambient drifts on the spookily atmospheric "Cut The Roots Pt 1". On "My Doomsday Serenade", Moskowitz sings about mortality, regret and *"passages towards reckoning"* over restless virtual accordion, waves of messy percussion and finally, a starkly poetic violin solo. "My Last Tear" follows on with a twinkling, heavy ambience – close up kalimba and zither are set against distant, elephantine brass. The complexity of layered voices, flutes and digital harps in "The Disappearance Of Fireflies" meanwhile recalls *Vespertine*-era Björk. Chimes grow sharp and dangerous with modulation effects on "Cut The Roots Pt 2", the mantra *"Earth and sky, heart and mind/ Seeds of peace find their way"* repeating over mystic atmospherics and, at the end, musique concrète jump-cuts through thunder, crowds and a marching band. The album closes with the tender and devastating "Unknown To Ourselves" which finds Moskowitz in chanteuse mode over cascading piano and keyboard lines that eventually fade into a calm nocturnal soundscape of chirping crickets.

Under An Endless Sky has an open and obvious affection for Moskowitz and her legacy, but thankfully it offers something much more than the sum of its parts and references. It speaks to our present moment with a yearning generosity and the kind of deep knowing that only comes with age.

Leah Kardos

State trooper: Dorothy Moskowitz

Courtesy Dorothy Moskowitz

eventually ends, and the very act of living becomes a more complicated, challenging endeavour.
Raymond Cummings

Lonnie Holley
Oh Me Oh My
Jagjaguwar CD/DL/LP
The notoriety of Alabamian found material sculptor Lonnie Holley arguably owes much to the sustained appetite for outsider art: that paradoxical situation where a noncommercial outlook can do wonders for one's profile. Regarding his music, which the septuagenarian only took up after a few decades as an artist, it'd stretch a point to ascribe him outsider status. Holley's fifth solo album *Oh Me Oh My* is overseen by super producer Jacknife Lee and features vocal duets with former REM frontman Michael Stipe and Justin Vernon of Bon Iver. Equally, none of those credits define a sweet ambient soul release filled with intriguing textures and historic pain.

"Kindness Will Follow Your Tears", with Vernon, deploys gospel backup and verges on saccharine, though Lee's arrangements have a winning, abstract sparseness. The title track – featuring Stipe – is flanked by "I Am A Part Of The Wonder" and "Earth Will Be There", both of which enlist Moor Mother, and it feels refreshing to hear her guest on records like this (in these cases, wonky jazz equal parts Latin and Arkestral) rather than noisy, blaring tracks. Rokia Koné (who recently recorded an album with Lee) and Sharon Van Etten both offer burnished foils to Holley as he alternately growls and soars.

The album's most compelling moment is also its most cacophonous. Eschewing guest singers, "Mount Meigs" is named after the Alabama correctional facility where Holley was housed in his teens, and its lyrics pick through his memories of the place – abusive, implicitly racist, evidently life-shaping – with unflinching ire over clattering punky jazz. *"We didn't get no graduate degree, but all of that information is still within me"*, he proclaims. Lonnie Holley is a creative lifer, even if a musical late bloomer, and *Oh Me Oh My* is at its strongest when exhibiting an everyman quality comparable to that of his street level sculptures.
Noel Gardner

Jens
Be As Good To Others As They Are Not To You
High On The Pyg Track LP
Jens Unosson is a Swedish musician whose work first attracted attention back in the 1990s via his excellent psych/prog outfit The Spacious Mind. Unosson has also played with various other outfits, and has released a trilogy of solo albums, of which this is the third entry. It's as fine a spin as anything I've heard in a good long while.

Be As Good To Others As They Are Not To You is a deep, dark cycle of songs, soaked with stark rural vibes and highlighted by subtle psychedelic touches. It feels of a piece, in many ways, with other ruralist hippy artists such as William Truckaway, the Raccoon Records stable, and Kendra Smith's Guild Of Temporal Adventurers. But it also displays a broken quality that puts it in the same vein as David Blue's *Stories* and Ned Collette's *Old Chestnut* (to name a couple of albums I have spent serious time soaking in recently).

Unosson's lyrics spin tales of loss – the death of his father, the end of a long relationship, legal battles to retain control of his farm – and much of the music provides suitably dolorous settings. He sings and plays mostly keyboards and percussion, while Arne Jonasson (Unosson's bandmate in Cauldron, Holy River Family Band and The Brotherhood Of Eternal Love) plays everything he can get his hands on. Beginning with loose threads of guitar and mock marimba that recall parts of Captain Beefheart's *Spotlight Kid*, the arrangements go from throbbing, skeletal fuzz bass riffing to simmering low key psych rock, all of it supporting Unosson's casual singing style and blistering imagery.

The album is a gas from start to finish, and John Hurford's cover art is perfect. Don't miss it.
Byron Coley

Nyokabi Kariũki
Feeling Body
cmntx DL/MC
Hot on the heels of 2022's *Peace Places: Kenyan Memories* EP comes Nyokabi Kariũki's full-length debut, a collection of spacious, diaristic songs inspired by the artist's experiences living with long Covid. It continues the EP's focus on field recordings and vocal layering, only now Kariũki is exploring more of her vocal range, not only its extreme registers, but also the expressive potential of dynamics and texture. The sound of water features throughout in different material forms – as ice, as a dripping tap, suggesting bathing, swimming, sinking – with lyrics drawing imagery from Kenyan tribal philosophies about water healing.

Feeling Body opens with the sotto voce prayer of "Subira", voices swooping and fluttering against a caressing central melody. It's a tapestry of utterances that sounds almost spiritual – transcendent and private, a worshipful congregation of one. The atmospheric title track patiently emerges from dripping water, soft sighs and almost inaudible whispered mantras to form a tightly gripping harmonic cluster, stubborn and constant. The piece moves between sounds of life, overlapping languages and an emotional voice note recorded by the artist (*"If you're not hopeful for your body, then who is?"*).

On "Fire Head", a text-to-speech voice rhythmically repeats the statement *"They stopped asking if I was OK"*, while background brass clusters merge with wobbly, filtered beats, a pulse that builds to an eruption resembling wet skin tearing open. The production of "Quiet Face" impresses with its detail and restrain, every sibilance in perfect position, every reflection controlled. The mournful counterpoint of "Folds" is restless and eerie, with Kariũki exploring the deeper parts of her vocal range. It closes with the cautious optimism of "Nazama", soulful, tender and alive. *Feeling Body* is a powerfully empathetic listening experience; patient and generous, overflowing with interior beauty.
Leah Kardos

Laibach
Sketches Of The Red Districts
God CD
Love Is Still Alive
Mute CD/DL/LP
Two new, near simultaneous releases by Slovenia's iron-fisted ironists Laibach set up a comfortable contrast. One, *Sketches Of The Red Districts*, purports to look into the past; *Love Is Still Alive*, an EP of eight thematically linked parts, into a catastrophic future. In practice, however, this material can't be summed up quite that simply.

The Austrian experimental label God pitches *Sketches* as a look back to Laibach's very first year of 1980, in what was then Yugoslavia, and a reassessment of how they put themselves about. The album's name refers to the region where the band operated – a nickname deriving from its penchant for revolution – and their intended debut live performance, titled *Red District* and banned from taking place by local mandarins. Track titles translate as "Moral Repentance" and "Some Important And Principled Thoughts About Future Direction". Musically, these seven pieces are more abrasive than much of Laibach's more recent, often wilfully schlocky output – not, as far as one can discern, reworkings of early material, but honouring its spirit with bouts of metallic scraping, martial percussion and gloomy ambient shiver.

Love Is Still Alive's opening segment "Moon, Euphoria", and a fair portion of the remainder, is stylistically distinct from this mode of Laibach, to say the least. It's a synthetic country and western song that begins *"My English is no heaven/My German's even worse/But I can drive my spaceship across the universe"* and eases us into a jovially presented concept record about an Earthbound apocalypse and those who escaped it. Mars, it transpires, is their planned destination, and as recent public figures pledging to colonise the red planet go, why not give a comedy Slovenian industrial band a shot?

The palindromic structure of the EP takes shape from here. The synth country gets more synth and less country, then becomes a sort of twangy electro number akin to The Grid's 1994 hit "Swamp Thing"; bombastic prog electronica like Jean-Michel Jarre might turn in for a West End musical; low key, staccato quasi-techno; Formica-clean space ambience with more twang; and finally "Mars, Dysphoria", a melancholy reprise of the opener.
Noel Gardner

Langham Research Centre & John Butcher
Six Hands At An Open Door
Persistence Of Sound CD/DL
Six Hands At An Open Door presents a different side to Langham Research Centre, the group of BBC Radio 3 producer/presenter alumni whose adoption of pre-synthesizer musique concrète hardware favours a carefully considered approach. Previous projects include their sonic investigation of the Gateshead multi-storey car park made infamous by the British gangster movie *Get Carter* and performing John Cage's electronic and tape works on kit contemporary to their composition. But here they join saxophonist John Butcher in a session

swapping indeterminacy for improvisation.

Langham Research Centre operate flexibly with up to four members. Here the titular six hands belong to Iain Chambers and Robert Worby along with Butcher, playing a set-up of oscillators, cassette tapes, shortwave radio and amplified small sounds. The sound world they create combines the abstract with the evocative – brief opener "Giddy Liberty" lays out the ground, its sputtering, grimy frequencies and aggressive sawtooth waves interwoven with snippets of speech radio and a sample of spider-legged solo piano. Butcher sidles deftly between, nudging gently at the gaps or teasing out pitches and adding his own multiphonic response.

The piano is a frequent visitor, lending a noirish tinge to "Everything Is Immanent"; on "A Thousand Small Deliberations" its nonchalantly dripping chords add an unsettling layer of commentary to sounds suggesting distant hovering helicopters and the opening of subterranean doors. Meanwhile, a reverberant metal spring is employed on "A Structural Creaking", Butcher's sustained tones an anchoring as layers shift around him.

Avoiding the temptation to let oscillators drone on unchecked, Chambers and Worby leave ample space as they shift between sound sources. As such, moments of inspiration are many but fleeting, and it's hard to find much focus in the 14 minute "Shadows In Place Of Logic". But on "Fancies Are Curled Around These Images" the restlessness is fruitful, the trio concocting a succession of fluttering, chirping arpeggios and pulses whose ephemerality only adds to their appeal.

Abi Bliss

Large Unit
Clusterfuck
PNL CD/DL
New Map
PNL CD/DL

The debut of Paal Nilssen-Love's Large Unit at the Molde Jazz Festival in 2013 signalled several changes. On a personal level, it marked the Norwegian's shift from the role of generally being the high energy younger guy on stage to being a leader who imparts lessons to less experienced musicians. He also became the leader of an established band that numbers 12 or more musicians, tours the world and plays his compositions.

That last point is particularly significant given that Nilssen-Love had naturally gravitated towards freedom whenever possible, and composed very sparingly for Atomic and The Thing. Since its founding, Nilssen-Love has kept the Large Unit evolving and changing, at one point turning it into a vehicle for uproarious, Brazilian-tinged performances of Ethiopian soul music.

Clusterfuck and *New Map* jointly celebrate the Large Unit's tenth anniversary, which will also be observed by tours of Ethiopia and Europe. They are a matched set, each featuring three pieces that were recorded at the same sessions, but they are divided

Kahil El'Zabar's Ethnic Heritage Ensemble
Spirit Gatherer: Tribute To Don Cherry
SpiritMuse CD/DL/2xLP

Kahil El'Zabar started drumming at four, switching to hand percussion as a teenager. He studied with Harold Murray, aka Black Harold, and played with Donny Hathaway, Pete Cosey and others early in his career. He joined the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians in the early 1970s, becoming its chair in 1976, and his group The Ethnic Heritage Ensemble was the first of the second wave of AACM acts to tour in Europe. Their debut album *Three Gentlemen From Chicago* was released on the Moers Music label in 1981, followed by titles on Red Records in Italy, the UK based Leo label, and Sweden's Silkheart, before they established a longterm relationship with Delmark, back home in Chicago.

The original Ethnic Heritage Ensemble line-up included saxophonists Edward Wilkerson and 'Light' Henry Huff. On 1984's *Welcome* (recorded in 1982) Huff was replaced by Kalaparusha Maurice McIntyre, and in the early 1990s, trombonist Joseph Bowie (brother of Lester, founder of Defunkt) became the second horn. Wilkerson left in the mid-90s, replaced by Ernest Dawkins, and Harold Murray (then known as Atu) joined, expanding the group to a quartet. Around 2005, Bowie left and trumpeter Corey Wilkes, who also works with The Art Ensemble Of Chicago, came on board. Sometime after the group's 2014 album *Black Is Back (40th Anniversary Project)* Dawkins departed, replaced by baritone saxophonist Alex Harding. That version of Ethnic Heritage Ensemble — El'Zabar, Wilkes and Harding, with guest cellist Ian Maksin — released *Be Known: Ancient/Future/Music* in 2019, and they're back again with this new release.

On this album, the core trio are joined by vocalist Dwight Trible and multi-instrumentalist David Ornette Cherry (Don Cherry's oldest son) who died on 20 November 2022, the night after this music was presented live as part of the London Jazz Festival. Thus, this album now exists as a tribute to both father and son. Most of the music was composed by El'Zabar, though they also perform versions of Cherry's "Degi-Degi" (from *Brown Rice*), Ornette Coleman's "Lonely Woman", Thelonious Monk's "Well You Needn't" and Pharoah Sanders's "Harvest Time" from his 1977 self-titled album. There's also "Sketches Of A Love Supreme" on which Harding essays the four-note line from the John Coltrane suite's first movement, while Wilkes takes a high flying trumpet solo and Trible sings lyrics presumably of his own writing.

The original pieces are quite varied. "Bop On" features a punchy unison theme for the horns, and Cherry on piano, with El'Zabar pounding out a beat on hand percussion that's swinging, but also has the steady pulse of Native American music. "Holy Man", in contrast, is a spiritual vamp with El'Zabar on balafon and Cherry contributing doson n'goni (a stringed instrument William Parker often plays), as both El'Zabar and Trible chant. On "Well You Needn't" the leader sounds like he's playing congas, Harding provides a bassline of sorts on the baritone, and Wilkes rockets into the sky. On "Lonely Woman" El'Zabar plays a conventional if minimal drum kit as the horns keen the heartbroken melody and Cherry plays a piano that sounds like they found it in a haunted house.

Here's the thing, though: as enjoyable as this album is, it's difficult to reconcile its ultimately gentle spirit to Don Cherry, the wild man who made albums like the brain-blasting *Eternal Rhythm* and *Where Is Brooklyn?*, and who collaborated with Albert Ayler and Krzysztof Penderecki. Trible, whose Paul Robeson-like baritone is genuinely impressive on Kamasi Washington's albums, adds very little here, sad to say. As part of the AACM's second generation, El'Zabar's music has often felt weighed down by the past — he spends a lot of time honouring those who came before him, and not enough carving his own artistic path. No matter who's behind them, 'tribute to the elders' projects like this often feel reined in and hagiographic, and that's very much the case here. It's too nice, and not nearly weird enough.

Phil Freeman

Spirit guide: Kahil El'Zabar

Ave Pildas Photography

by compositional strategy. The pieces on *Clusterfuck* use graphic notation to guide the currently 15-strong ensemble; *New Map*'s employ open form cells comprising notated or written prompts. Both are process oriented methods that set up encounters between ensemble subsections and direct the musicians into passages of free improvisation that give free reign to expressionistically tangling horns and starburst sound-clusters from the accordion, strings and percussion. That's certainly the case on "Circles", from *New Map*, where the cells function like traffic roundabouts that move the action from drizzling percussion to sections of seething interplay before resolving into a stomping blues.

But there are also moments, such as the co-occurrence of sequential instrumental duels and with a long passage of flamenco guitar on "Moodplay", from *Clusterfuck*, and the stately opening and closing sequences of *New Map*'s title track, that indicate that the composer is thinking about how the music sounds as much as what it does. This impression is confirmed by the fact that both albums include harp and electronics overdubs that were done separately from the ensemble recording sessions. And the alternations between sparse, quiet interaction and more pugnacious exchanges suggests that "Clusterfuck" was named for something the music was designed to avoid, not generate.

Taken as a pair, these albums confirm that Nilssen-Love's skills as a leader and composer have caught up to his undeniable merits as a drummer.

Bill Meyer

Machinefabriek
+
Bandcamp CD/DL

Theories of musical form seldom, if ever, address the day to day demands of parenthood, but the responsibilities of childcare played a key role in determining the structure of this new release from Dutch sound artist Rutger Zuydervelt, aka Machinefabriek. Finding himself unable to devote his energies to the development of longform compositions, he made the pragmatic decision to invite a range of collaborators to send him minute-long recordings, which he could then process and rework. The resultant miniatures, 52 in all, are gathered on the succinctly named +.

This resourceful project draws together a selection of contributors with strikingly diverse musical backgrounds and current interests. Yet it hangs together convincingly overall, making a virtue of its fragmentary nature and disparate character. As his prolific discography emphatically shows, Zuydervelt has had extensive experience of collaborative ventures. He has a well-honed capacity to shape and coordinate materials without sacrificing their difference and distinctness. He knows how to mix ingredients with sensitivity, piecing together a bigger picture that carries his personal stamp, lightly yet tellingly.

On the opening track Zuydervelt engages with the sound of music boxes, as manipulated by Jeroen Diepenmaat. During the closing minute, he adds his own dramatic gloss to the reedy piping of Naomi Sato's shō. In between, an invigorating array of sound sources includes the strangulated tones of Stian Larsen's electric guitar and the amplified tines of Graham Dunning's featherphone. There's Gareth Davis's bass clarinet, Christine Ott's ondes Martinot, Mara Winter's medieval bass flute, Eva-Maria Houben's piano, Giovanni Di Domenico's Fender Rhodes and Ameel Brecht's baroque lute. Leafcutter John recorded scrap metal parts; Jeremy Young opted for sinewaves and radio; Leo Chadburn's speaking voice muses on landscape and the weather.

The list goes on, and on repeated listening Machinefabriek's crafty assemblage continues to offer frequent surprises and small delights.

Julian Cowley

Valentina Magaletti
Different Rooms
Longform Editions DL

Valentina Magaletti & Laila Sakini
Cupo
Bandcamp DL/LP

Valentina Magaletti has long crossed over the confines of what is usually perceived as the domain of drummers and percussionists. She ventured so far out, in fact, that her rhythms forgot what they were meant to be and became textures instead. Even now, the Italian born, London based musician's contribution to the Longform Editions series is a staggering new step into the abstract and unknown.

Throughout the single, 20 odd minute track, any semblance of clean percussive hits seems to have transmogrified and disintegrated long before the music was committed to tape. A fragmented boom that might have once been a kick drum propels the cut, but goes back into hiding by diving beneath a scuzzy texture the moment it receives attention. Meanwhile, the fabric at the centre of the soundscape begins to morph. It screams uncomfortably as it expands and contracts, attracting a flock of confused, interpolated voices, noise fragments of unknown origin and deformed cymbal hits. *"Chick chicka"*, blasts Magaletti's distorted voice, closely shadowed by breathy recorder-like effects and xylophone approximations. Finally, phase-shifted spectral organs saturate and consume the music, simultaneously embracing the constructive-destructive effects of lo-fi production similar to how they're employed in raw black metal. An unnerving experience unlike any other, the piece instils the utterly paralysing, primordial fear of the dark that Kyle Edward Ball's film *Skinamarink* tried and failed to capture.

While still fairly unsettling, Magaletti's collaboration with another London based artist, Australian composer Laila Sakini, is a safe space in comparison, even as the words *"I feel a shadow, it's alive"* tremble in air. Reminiscent of Lucrecia Dalt's cavernous works (*Anticlines* in particular), *Cupo* is a collection of thrilling, claustrophobic miniatures. Here, the role of Magaletti's deft touch on drums, steel pans, chimes and other percussive elements is to open sonic pockets, which Sakini first fills with her echoing voice and digging bass frequencies, then punctuates using gently bowed strings, resonating woodwind licks and the occasional ASMR whisper and click. This is what industrial music would sound like if the empty halls and cold steel of abandoned factories could make music.

Antonio Poscic

Meemo Comma
Loverboy
Planet Mu DL/LP

Like her two previous album projects, Lara Rix-Martin's latest release as Meemo Comma is heavily concept-driven. *Loverboy* is set in the 1990s, its sequence of tracks outlining a story occurring across a single night out clubbing. From waiting for the drugs to kick in, to making new best friends on the dancefloor, the vague narrative here evokes something of the romantic hijinks of Justin Kerrigan's 1999 film *Human Traffic*.

In a few places Rix-Martin drops samples of London East End wide boys mouthing off, which adds a certain Danny Dyer-style cheekiness to proceedings. The production aesthetic evokes the tech sound of the era, from the vintage breaks and synth tones down to the retro-accurate manipulations – reverse flips, half and quarter tempo shifts, granular artefacts on low bit-rate audio.

"Cloudscape" opens with fizzing, pastel major key anticipation. It comes on slowly with chunky beats bubbling up under long streaks of angelic melody. The cruder sonics of "Loneheath" take things to the nostalgic zone, an eccentric texture that weaves down sampled breaks, sighing vocal hits, reverberated claps and spasmodic mono synth bass, with what sounds like a guy in the background saying, *"Hello cunt!"*. Things get disorienting on "Whitehawk" as Rix-Martin puts her playful rave riffs through spaced-out sound effects and twists the tempo around. The temporal slips are echoed in the shorter segues "Bit Of A Boy" and "Ignite", brief sonic sketches that flip between up/down tempos, drum 'n' bass screeching into triphop and back and again.

The middle of the album skews towards the danceable and bouncy, with the slinky, IDM-inspired "Kyle", the propulsive title track and the stop-start jungle loops of "The Rush". The record loses its grip on time and form with the shifty "Andro" and evokes violence with the dark and throbbing "EX-P1". More than just a nostalgic trip, *Loverboy* is witty, weird and stubbornly original – qualities that compel me to go back and listen again.

Leah Kardos

Maggie Nicols & Marc Wastell
And John
Confront CD/DL

This Friendship Is Sailing
Shape Shifters
Bandcamp CD/DL

Two new releases feature free music vocalist Maggie Nicols in differing collaborative configurations. The first is *And John*, a pair of live duo sets performed in 2022 with fellow improvisor Mark Wastell. As the title suggests,

the documented sessions serve as something of an homage to John Stevens, founder of the Spontaneous Music Ensemble, which Nicols joined in the late 1960s.

In the cover feature for *The Wire* 445, Nicols told Louise Gray how influential Stevens's approach was on her development as an improvisor. This development is on full display over these two long tracks as Nicols warbles, ululates, shrieks, squeaks, yelps and groans over Wastell's loose and airy percussion (included in Wastell's set-up are a couple of cymbals which had belonged to Stevens). While Spontaneous Music Ensemble were known for their leaderless lack of hierarchy, they were also governed by a directive that the group's improvisors must listen closely to each other. This spirit is present here, where an attunement to negative space allows for Nicols's intuitive vocalisations and Wastell's inquisatory rhythms to continually discover themselves and each other.

The second release is *Shape Shifters* by This Friendship Is Sailing, an ensemble comprising Nicols on voice, piano and tap dancing, Odie Jl Ghast on voice, Sam Andreae on homemade electronics and alto saxophone, and David Birchall on electric guitar. Recorded live at London's Cafe Oto in 2021, the tone is set by the playful, childlike sounds permeating "We Hear You, We Hear You".

Several minutes into the mewling cacophony, Nicols launches into a story about hearing a baby cry during a visit to Sicily. Instead of trying to quiet the infant, the adults of the community took a position of solidarity with it, meeting its need to make noise with reassuring vocalisations of their own. In Nicols's telling, this anecdote becomes a powerful affirmation of prelinguistic sonicity. Although devoid of semantic content, a baby's cries are intensely communicative – an apt metaphor for Nicols's own improvisatory practice.

Emily Pothast

Tujiko Noriko
Crépuscule I & II
Editions Mego 2xCD/DL

Throughout 20-plus years of releasing music, Tujiko Noriko hasn't stood still, happily moving from whimsy to seriousness, from traditional instrumentation and song to abstraction or ambience. Sometimes a release will be hyperfocused – 2005's *28* with Aoki Takamasa, for example, was a coherent fusion of glitchy clicks & cuts-style tracks with vocals and song structure, while her 2019 soundtrack for her self-directed film *Kuro* was an exercise in intensity through restraint.

Often, though, they're all over the place, with drone, post-rock and mutant pop sitting side by side. This set for the Editions Mego label is definitely more on the consistent side, with Noriko at her most flowing and diffuse. All sounds blur together, acoustic instruments barely recognisable in the steady flow, the scale often vast – or at least indeterminate – as songs sprawl to 12, 18, 24 minutes. At the same time there are songs with structures, and while Noriko's syllables sometimes blur into the flow, they're as often close miked, crisp and clear.

You might find distant echoes of Slowdive and Julee Cruise rippling through something that recalls Biosphere's greyest on grey Arctic soundscapes. But given the scale of the album and the individual songs, far more often you're cut loose from reference points. Which isn't to say it's formless, by any means: even the slowest developing tracks like the instrumental centrepiece "A Meeting At The Space Station" are clearly deliberated over, chord sequences altering their character gradually, tiny details coming close to you even as the blurred tones wash out to infinity.

Throughout the album the play of simple and sublime, cocooning intimacy and cosmic scale, happens in very different ways – even with a seeming consistency of sound, Noriko is as varied as ever.

Joe Muggs

Old Spirit
Burning In Heaven
Bright As Night DL/LP

Old Spirit is a solo project by Wisconsin guitarist Jason Hartman of Vanishing Kids, Jex Thoth and Diati. Listening to *Burning In Heaven* – the follow up to 2022's self-titled debut – it's superficially obvious what's so old about it; to quote Saint Vitus, it sounds born too late.

Offset by sweeping psych and space rock panoramas, it's a defiantly dated but stylistically fluid expedition through heavy metal phrasings of the type that would stop winning new audiences by the dawn of the 1990s. Nonetheless, its playfulness and mercuriality make it contemporary while charismatic, swaggering riffs make it cohesive.

Some tracks are more fully devotional than others. "Fallacy" is the most Sabbathian, starting as a mid-paced canter a la "Hole In The Sky" before dropping to funerary metre. "When The Spirit Slips Away" is most in thrall to stroboscopic, vaporous kosmische synth. Elsewhere, the gears within tracks are more slippery. On "Angel Blood" Hartman's vocals shift from King Diamond falsetto to the languorous opium den groan of Celtic Frost's Tom G Warrior circa *Into The Pandemonium*. Meanwhile "In Dismay" briefly but incongruously cross-channels Lou Reed and Peter Murphy. Isengard's 1994 album *Vinterskugge* occasionally comes to mind, a compilation of fledgling style exercises by Darkthrone's Fenriz, too naif for his main project. If he'd amalgamated that teenage lightning scrapbook with his other sideline, the Tangerine Dream inspired Neptune Towers, this would be on similar terrain.

As Old Spirit, Hartman strikes me as a perpetually quantum leaping retrofuturist trad metal magus in search of his own time. The unconvinced will hear something more akin to an adolescent air guitarist singing into a hairbrush. But those of us who dig it find the distinction moot.

James Gormley

Anthony Pateras
Two Solos
Futura Resistenza DL/LP

About the only thing you can say for sure about an Anthony Pateras album is that

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The Basketweave Elegies

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Michael Byron
Halcyon Days

"One of those contemporary composers who can justifiably be classed as crucial. . . . Byron's music dances with tremulous iridescence."
—Julian Cowley, *The Wire*

"Byron's music is immediately comprehensible and beautiful, while it remains experimental."
—*San Francisco Bay Guardian*

Nicholas Chase
Tiny Thunder

Chase's music has been described as **"brilliant"** (*The Strad*), **"quietly provocative . . . compelling"** (*Textura*), and **"most imaginative"** (*LA Weekly*).

www.coldbluemusic.com

it probably won't be like his last one. His endeavours have included long-duration solo piano music, glitchy electronics with eRikm, and an exercise in stylistic promiscuity with Mike Patton. Still, themes do emerge. *Two Solos* is his second recording in a row to use live and taped musicians. But while its predecessor *Pseudacusis* was a sprawling piece played by two septets, this LP narrows the focus to a pair of works for solitary musicians, whose performance swims in a stream of their own sounds.

"Palimpsest Geometry (2020)" is a study in exponential replication. The math starts with Callum G'Froerer's instrument, a rare double-bell trumpet, which enables a brass musician the option to make two sounds at once. He plays quick, staccato bursts of single notes which vary in length, tempo and volume, alongside tapes of him doing the same thing with other pitches. The individual parts are quite simple, but their interaction could easily turn into a mess. Judicious mixing draws different voices in and out of the flow, and periodic moments of silence give both player and audience some breathing room. The result is pretty trippy but never overwhelming.

On the record's other side, vocalist Clara La Licata performs "There Is Danger That Only Our Mistakes Are New (2021)". Its raw material is an ascending two-note phrase, which she sings and hums up and down the scale. Where G'Froerer's sounds spread and multiply, her vocals cluster into close harmonies. If the process of combining a voice with its taped versions is supposed to be the point, this piece may be deemed less successful, because it simply sounds like the singer has overdubbed herself. But if you forget about process, it's easy to surrender to her clusters of bobbing tones.

Bill Meyer

Pita/Friedl
Same
Karl DL/2xLP

Since the close of the 1990s Reinhold Friedl, Berlin based director of Ensemble Zeitkratzer, has made the grand piano's interior his own exploratory domain, opening up its sound world in spectacular fashion. In Vienna during July 2021, he recorded three concentrated pieces, each roughly 20 minutes in length, with Peter 'Pita' Rehberg.

Further collaborative sessions were envisaged but before the end of that month the electronic musician and curator of Editions Mego died suddenly and unexpectedly, and the fourth side of this double LP remains resonantly blank. The three remaining sides testify to a bond of creative reciprocity that existed between these two strong personalities and uncompromising musicians.

The titles "Caciara", "Chiasso" and "Clamore" all signify in Italian a loud and sustained noise, which is accurate, so far as it goes. Beyond that immediate impact, fine judgement and alert responsiveness are at work in the continuous play of contrasts and correspondences, formation of meshed textures, generation of variable densities and judicious scattering of ear-catching details, some of which – notably on "Clamore" – are surprisingly delicate.

Overall, the music undergoes frequent changes of acoustic state, conveying solidity and mass, liquid flux, gaseous jets and bubbling turbulence. It's tempting to suggest that the electronic and amplified acoustic sound sources are often indistinguishable; that it's difficult to tell who is doing what. In fact, for the most part, Friedl and Pita don't merge their forthright identities to quite that extent, but they are clearly tuned in to a shared wavelength, intensely attentive to each other's actions and reactions, each carried forward by the cumulative momentum of their interplay. Poignant that no sequel is possible, but this is a suitably vigorous tribute to Rehberg and his feisty encounter with Friedl.

Julian Cowley

P/O Massacre
Aural Corrosion
WV Sorcerer CD/DL

P/O Massacre is the duo project of Anton Ponomarev (saxophone/electronics) and Anton Obrazeena (guitar/electronics). Their music relies on signal chain manipulation as much as notes and compositional strategies; on their self-titled debut album from 2021, Obrazeena's guitar ran through two guitar stacks and one bass amp, while Ponomarev's tool kit included pedals, Moog processors, spring reverb, drone effects and more, travelling independently through the left and right channels of their PA system. The result was a floor-shaking, skull-vibrating, constantly transmuting roar, part Borbetomagus-like free jazz, part Merzbow-esque noise.

This follow-up brings a pair of impressive guests to the party. Its first third ("Chanting The Resonances Of Atrocity") features additional electronics from Alex Buess, who was a member of Swiss noise jazz trio 16-17 and Kevin Martin's industrial dub metal crew Ice, and also worked with Paul Schütze. The second part ("Anti-War Music") is a collaboration with Masami Akita himself. The CD and digital versions feature bonus track "Nonslaught", created by Ponomarev and Obrazeena alone.

The collaboration with Buess is the more conventionally musical, albeit abrasive, of the two. Obrazeena's guitar sounds like a guitar, cutting through with clanging post-punk chords, ultra-sludgy doom riffs, and echoing tones like signals sent through clouds of poison gas. The electronics are dubbed out, with static and distorted samples pulsing in a way that recalls Autechre at their most mean-spirited. There's almost no saxophone until the second half, when Ponomarev wails like a dinosaur mourning a dead child, but there are breakbeats and a 4/4 techno thump deployed like land mines. The Merzbow collaboration is much more about overpowering the listener with massive whooshes and roars, but there's a frantic beat at the heart of it all. It's like listening to a set by Pan Sonic played from inside a sandstorm.

Phil Freeman

Quatuor Bozzini
Éliane Radigue: Occam Delta XV
Collection QB CD/DL

As composer Éliane Radigue's group of chevaliers de Occam (knights of Occam) — the elite musicians that work closely with her to present new, customised pieces in her Occam series — keeps expanding, the music itself continues to occupy a rather fixed landscape, albeit one that's anything but static on close inspection.

The remarkable Montreal string ensemble Quatuor Bozzini are the latest musicians to share their collaboration with the world and it's a doozy. By presenting two performances of the work, the ensemble demonstrate both the fixed dimension and the highly mobile quality of the music contained within an almost monolithic block of shimmering sound that hovers like a thick cumulus cloud, a mass marked by infinite striations.

Over the years Quatuor Bozzini have developed a sterling reputation for their ability to bring astonishing rigour and precision to the thorniest, most exploratory work — whether the dazzling quartets of Wandelweiser mainstay Jürg Frey or the psychoacoustic experiments of Alvin Lucier, with many stops in between — and the multifaceted sound world they produce here is as glorious and rich as anything in the group's vast repertoire. As with *Occam Ocean 2*, Radigue's magnificent piece for the French improvising orchestra ONCEIM, this new iteration affords listeners a more generous pathway into the composer's aesthetic than the many solo pieces she's produced, as just beneath the glacial surface of the music resides an endlessly changing slow churn of rhythm, lines and acoustical beating.

While each iteration comes in the form of a single, impressive mass of sound, the level of refined listening and interaction required to achieve lift off is demanding, and the ensemble have spent several years developing their relationship to the music, exploring the endless combinations of tones and harmonic depth in a way that's practically telepathic. The two versions are in no way identical, and Quatuor Bozzini gamely embrace the structural openness of Radigue's music, encountering fresh interactions with each reading.

Peter Margasak

Susana Santos Silva & Fred Frith
Laying Demons To Rest
RogueArt CD/DL

A consistent thread in Fred Frith's improvising and composing practice – there is, significantly, a piece on 1987's *The Technology Of Tears* titled "Jigsaw" – is a sense that the whole composition is somehow present in fragmentary and scattered form, to be pieced together in real time and in the listener's consciousness. Similarly, Susana Santos Silva's solo trumpet performances often sound as if they are 3D printing a physical object in the resonant performance space, its components actualised one by one but necessarily in a top down, basics to finer detail direction. Likewise the dancer and the dance inquiries of Frith's work for choreographers, of which 1988's *The Technology Of Tears* is one of the best.

Few artists have asked such searching questions about improvisation and composition as Frith, but without embroiling in that tedious debate or equally dreary proclamation that the distinction is hereby

A recovered cotton gin motor forms the basis of an installation and multi-artist album initiated by Kevin Beasley

By Daniel Spicer

Kevin Beasley
A View Of A Landscape
The Renaissance Society At The University Of Chicago 2xLP+Pbk

What troubling treasures the internet provides. Around a decade ago, New York based artist Kevin Beasley stumbled across an eBay listing for a motor that had previously been used on a farm in Maplesville, Alabama, to power a cotton gin, separating seeds from cotton fibre. It set off a pinball of associations. Beasley considers himself likely to be descended from slaves who picked cotton on such a farm. He himself was raised in the South, in Lynchburg, Virginia (how's that for a name ensnared in cruel resonances?) not far from land that members of his family still own. Intrigued, he travelled to Maplesville and purchased the motor.

Between December 2018 and March 2019, it formed the basis of Beasley's installation at New York's Whitney gallery entitled *A View Of A Landscape*, for which he used a modular synthesizer to manipulate the motor's rumble and create musical improvisations. It's a concept that raises serious questions: by transforming this totem of oppression and exploitation into a generator of art, is Beasley doing any more than just drawing our attention to past horrors? Is he proposing a means of transcending them, of alchemising suffering and bondage into liberating self-expression? The installation encouraged further interpretation by inviting percussionist Eli Keszler and electronic musician Jlin to perform live using Beasley's modified motor sounds as source material – and Beasley collaborated with multi-instrumentalist/vocalist Taja Cheek (aka L'Rain) for a one-off performance.

This double LP – accompanied by a 300 page book of essays and images examining Beasley's work and its relation to the family land in Virginia – invites those past collaborators and several others to contribute new tracks, all of which propose a collaborative spirit by sampling Beasley's recordings. Unsurprisingly, many of them openly incorporate the motor's metallic clank and whir – yet there's a wide range of approaches on display, revealing a diversity of emotional responses and differing understandings of the artist's role.

Some tracks seem to deftly sidestep the seriousness of the subject matter. Jlin's "Vernacular" lays down an information-rich banger populated by disjointed beats and video game whooshes. It's fun and forward-thinking – and sounds nothing like 20th century farm machinery. Similarly, Robert Aiki Aubrey Lowe's "Figures On Land" subjects machine noise to muted modulation and dubwise effects, creating submerged beats like an automated factory doubling as a secret club for lonely androids. On "Save ur flesh, Captured Dancer" New York duo SCRAAATCH fill a sparse environment with metallic shrieks and a sampled woman's voice repeatedly proclaiming *"I'm done"*. Is she done slaving? Done caring? Exhausted by the track's urgent yet eerily fragmented gabber beat?

Other cuts betray a deeper commitment to the project's original impetus. On "Face The Rock" jazz pianist Jason Moran enlivens a rumbling roar with minimalist tintinnabulations, plangent chords and agile surges and whirls that feel like human cries of frustration and longing. And, on "Lines" Los Angeles based singer and cellist Kelsey Ku sets up a miasmic murk of ghostly voices and spidery keyboard topped with squelchy bass throb and acid wibble before unfurling sombre stridulations that bespeak the shouldering of tragedy. It's just one example of an urge to collage that informs several tracks. Moor Mother's "Oil Rivers" is a dense scrapbook of noise, indistinct chatter and samples of Islamic praise song and Southern gospel, with her own sternly scowling exhortations buried tantalisingly in the mix. Eli Keszler's "In A Landscape" proposes a weird double perspective, juxtaposing a cavernously distant background melody with a glitchy foreground: vocoded grunts tangling with celestial twinkle in a messy meeting of heaven and earth.

Actually, intimations of the heavenly pervade a number of tracks. Laurel Halo's "Resin" is a warmly throbbing amniotic drone that promises to soothe all pain; L'Rain's "Reverses, After Maya" beams bright shafts of healing light while a voice – slowed down, sped up, warped and manipulated so as to resemble man, woman and child – utters the simple phrase *"I'm here"* like a reassuring embrace from all of humanity. If, given their provenance, these tracks seem to suggest some kind of fully automated utopia where servitude and labour are abolished, they're not without bitter irony: while the cotton gin motor was intended to reduce the need for manual labour, it increased efficiency so significantly that it created an even greater demand for slave labour to grow and pick the crop by hand.

The album is bookended by two collaborations featuring Beasley. On "Surfacing" he projects the motor's insistent whir while poet Fred Moten intones weary bars, both intimate and uneasy. *"What's the difference between ground and background?"*, he asks, just as the mechanism's slow judder starts to drown him out. On the climactic "by" actor and writer Okwui Okpokwasili speak-sings theatrically over syncopated beats, offering elusive thoughts that, like Moten's lines, seem to shed little light on the themes underlying Beasley's installation. But perhaps it's unrealistic to expect clear statements or definitive pronouncements. Just this morning, the internet tells me that 29 year old Tyre Nichols was killed by Memphis police. The systemic oppression of African-Americans rolls on like an implacable motor. Beasley's project provides a vital space where raw responses to the darkness – some tough, some tender – can flourish and glow. ○

Remote viewer: Kevin Beasley

David Schulze

suspended. With Silva, performing here at Moloco in Mulhouse, he has a wholly sympathetic sharer. Old friend and Henry Cow associate Tim Hodgkinson offers a poetic reflection on the music in the sleevenotes, but breaks off to offer a footnote, insisting that neither improvisation nor composition is the "point". He insists that Frith's work is about the evocation of atmospheres and feelings. Silva has this too. In fact, "There are moments during this performance in which [Susana] leads Fred firmly into the evoked worlds of her personal consciousness, when he had been lost in the extreme actuality of their interaction. Or is it the other way round?".

Whatever they conjure up over 40 minutes of intense, sometimes stark, sometimes unrecognisable guitar and trumpet is a sense that divided states are somehow put back together again, but not to rise in majesty; to simply sink back into the silence.

Brian Morton

Colin Stetson
Chimæra I
Room40 DL/LP
The Menu OST
Milan DL/LP

Considering his soundtracks for *Hereditary*, *Color Out Of Space* and *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, Montreal based composer and saxophonist Colin Stetson deserves the title of honorary scream king. His compositional approach, much like his physical, robust saxophone playing, favours towering figures and insidious circular patterns that can be moulded to narrate all sorts of horrors, from cosmic dread and occult mysteries to gory slashers. Even if the critique of consumerism and capitalism at the heart of Mark Mylod's *The Menu* is fairly meek in comparison to these eldritch themes, Stetson's cues remain equally crucial and vivid.

Mylod's film is not the subtle examination of contemporary bourgeoisie found in Ruben Östlund's *Triangle Of Sadness*, either. Instead of sophistication, its impact more closely resembles a fist to the face, shrouded in a striking visual aesthetic. In turn, Stetson's score becomes one of his lusher and immediately poignant works, while its pieces simultaneously underscore each scene and outline a carbon copied emotional narrative. At times, delicate melodies and violin pizzicato are swirled in expression of nervous excitement and awe. At others, murmuring organ lines and needle-like percussive flourishes are left to simmer on a razor's edge, only for hammered strings, unnerving rhythms and Stetson's overblown bass saxophone lines to introduce a sensation of abject terror. Across all these vignettes, the soundtrack succeeds both as a standalone work and a significant part of the film itself.

While drone elements play a significant role in Stetson's *New History Warfare* series and his contributions to Ex Eye, *Chimæra I* is devoted exclusively to this form. Here, his overtones and multiphonics grow from frog-like croaks into the plaintive bellow of giant creatures roaming a desolate planet underneath a wondrous, rather than horrific, atmosphere. Between these extremes, he sculpts knotted miniatures from sustained tones and releases pillars of devotional smoke reminiscent of Phurpa, before glittering synth textures tame them into a cinematic flow evocative of the late Jóhann Jóhannsson. Although the two 20 minute pieces don't veer too far from the foundations of the genre, Stetson's sensibilities and extended techniques elevate them well above the average.

Antonio Poscic

Submerged
Fury
Ohm Resistance 2xCD/DL

Kurt Gluck has been making dark, aggressive electronic music as Submerged for over 20 years, on his own and as a member of Bill Laswell's Method Of Defiance, the collective The Blood Of Heroes, and other projects. Much of his work falls under the umbrella of drum 'n' bass, but he's drawn to overpowering sounds of every stripe, so his compositions (the term tracks feels unfair, as Gluck's music can't be reduced to dancefloor utilitarianism) throw in elements of industrial, harsh noise, metal and more. His work can even be beautiful at times.

Fury is many things – sometimes beautiful, but just as often terrifying in its intensity. It's a nearly 100 minute double CD that begins with a piece called "Death Spiral", passes through "Positive Anger", and the urges to "Burn Everything To Cinder" and "Let The Darkness Consume You", winding down with "Every Sadness Put Away And In Its Place Forever, Even If That Means I'm Dead" and "The Last Day". It's an inward journey that's simultaneously introspective and explosive, with guest vocalists Alex Boniwell (of early 2000s industrial noise punks Leech Woman) and Anna Meiere (of Molecular) delivering scathing diatribes on "Burn", "Strength", "A Positive Anger" and "Geocorona" that fall somewhere between Killing Joke and Atari Teenage Riot. The beats are chaotic and punishing, travelling beyond drum 'n' bass into gabber and pure noise, and the music shifts gears from plangent melodies to sustained bursts of suppressive synth fire. "Inexorable" alone seems to travel through about a half dozen stages in less than five minutes.

Meanwhile, "Öö" has the moodiness of *Hesitation Marks* era Nine Inch Nails, while the 20 minute "Every Sadness" features electric viola and a female voice that seems to echo out of a half-remembered dream. *Fury* feels like a magnum opus, a powerful work of genuinely compelling art.

Phil Freeman

Ibukun Sunday
Mantra
Phantom Limb/Spirituals DL

Phantom Limb's Spirituals sublabel is bringing together a wealth of astonishing new experimental voices from around the world and *Mantra* might just be their most rewarding release yet. Nigerian electronic musician and violist Ibukun Sunday blends ambient textures, West African folk and field recordings for this new album based on the ancient Rig Veda, particularly focused on the mantra's ability to free the mind. *Mantra* is cyclical and hypnotic, but crucially keeps moving through its ideas and never lets anything linger into a place of distraction. It's over in a half hour but it feels wonderfully endless.

Opener "Purport" immediately establishes a Laraaji-esque space but you can already hear Sunday's unique ability to stealthily blend in samples, little shards of a kid's conversation that give you an even stronger sense of place and space. "Compulsory" reminded me of Dedekind Cut's most transcendent moments before "Culture Of Knowledge" travels from a snatched slice of echoey Yoruba and Igbo dialogue to a glowing ember of refracted sound, dying as soon as it's born. Though clearly touched by Western influences such as Gas, William Basinski, Terry Riley and Manuel Göttsching, Sunday is brilliant at bringing his own home culture into this sound, the samples and rhythms evoking West African skies and spaces.

"Avaśisyate" posits a whole new minimal Afro-gothness, pianistic lines of melody coalescing around a hollowed out but resonant central root note. "Contradictory" sees your mind and body separate and regard each other with a genuinely moving (and very Vedic) parallel consciousness – the textures of layered ambient chords suggesting both movement and an ascetic stillness. The devastating "Illusion" makes the dichotomy in this music clear, but also melts it – there's an intensely cinematic and visual feel to much of *Mantra*, but it always returns to a place of meditative wonder.

Neil Kulkarni

Max Syedtollan
Disposables
33-33 CD/DL

Glasgow based composer Max Syedtollan describes *Disposables* – a record beginning with a low electronic squiggle over some barely audible background chatter – as his "pop album". It's a joke – sort of, maybe – typical of Syedtollan's burlesque of contemporary classical musical tropes, and of his particular corner of Glasgow's underground scene, where artists and hastily assembled bands exist on the margins of seriousness; on the line dividing art and farce. Here, his freewheeling spirit remains, but any sense of laboured composition is out of the window in favour of on the spot meanderings and purposefully diaristic catharsis.

The reason for this is at least partly circumstantial, as the recordings date from a time when Syedtollan was recovering from an accident and – presumably – feeling the effects of being stuck in one place. There's a very particular stir crazy feel to the songs, including the aching misery drone of "Death Island" and "It's Nothing To Me", a half-mumbled recitation of relationship woes over intrusive keyboard presets. In its irritating feedback loops and nursery rhyme whispers, "State Holiday" truly nails the exhaustion of being skint and stuck, slipping in a note of horror in among its relatable moans (*"I need a fucking holiday/I'm not sure what I'm capable of these days"*).

"I Don't Want Lorenzo Hearing Me Singing Today" is a meta burst of paranoia bashed out in the time it takes for a neighbour,

flatmate or landlord to come back inside the flat (*"He's heard me once before, but not again"*). On Syedtollan's excellent 2021 tape *Four Assignments (& Other Pieces)* his vocal recitations seemed to trigger the musical transitions – here, he seems to be riling himself up with his own manic accompaniment. *Disposables* is fun, and funny, in its own right, but it's also intriguing in the context of Syedtollan's growing output, as a contradictory development of his musical practice born of stillness and frustration.
Claire Biddles

La Tène
Ecorcha/Taillée
Bongo Joe CD/DL/LP
In a nod to their namesake – a European Iron Age culture – the French-Swiss ensemble La Tène strike a balance between Occitane folk melodies, drone and rock-influenced rhythms. Previous albums such as 2017's *Tardive/Issime* and 2018's *Abandonnée/Maleja* codified their style, exploring the spellbinding patterns that have come to drive every aspect of their work. Their fourth record *Ecorcha/Taillée* continues along this path, this time spinning outward from influences that include Christian hymn "La Passion" and Rosalía's 2022 hit "Saoko". But where preceding records often tapped into the power of stasis, this one sees the group get a little wilder, finding a flow state in off-kilter bursts.

They hit hardest on the album's A side track "Ecorcha", which builds from a gnarly chromatic scale into an intricate lattice of rhythm and texture. Folk melodies colour the song's steady momentum, which wavers between dissonances and unisons, but always comes back together. There's a feeling of perseverance throughout, driven by the group's ritualistic repetition, but occasionally, they break away in energetic spurts. Though many parts, like the nasally explosion near the end of the piece, feel out of step and unexpected, each element gravitates towards the others, generating a hypnotic feel.

Though La Tène's music is based on finding inspiration in past melodies, *Ecorcha/Taillée* feels decidedly of the moment. It's music meant to be felt intrinsically, to be guided through the present with. In its ever-looping movements and chaotic detours, there's a feeling of careless abandon, a call to let loose and surrender to now.
Vanessa Ague

Valerio Tricoli/Werner Dafeldecker/Mattin
Le Diable Probablement
Eclectic Reactions DL/MC
Le Diable Probablement is a surprising record for Bilbao noise and improv stalwart Mattin to be involved with at this time. In recent years, he has largely been engaged with a project of employing the audience as an instrument, as he elaborates in his 2022 book *Social Dissonance*. This entails generating destabilising situations among crowds at his gigs, and thus, as his thinking goes, enacting a kind of Brechtian alienation effect which challenges the categories governing people's lives under capitalism.

Aside from the extent to which all genuinely experimental music is in affinity with an aspiration to live and feel

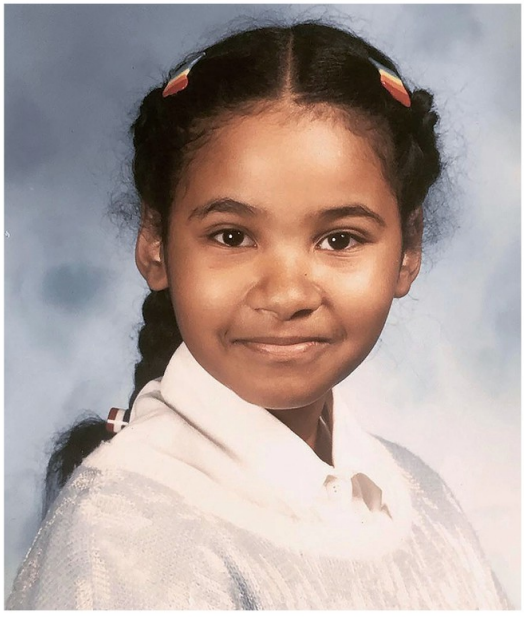
Jean Grae
*Minister Jean Grae Presents You F**king Got This Sh!t: Affirmations For The Modern Persons*
Bandcamp DL
Like all the best legends, Jean Grae earned the title by being herself, obstinately, in the face of expectations. For all her acclaim and phenomenal abilities as an MC she never saw herself purely or even primarily as a rapper. While for over a decade after emerging into the mid-1990s New York scene she tried to play the industry game as best as she could, ultimately her strengths were way too idiosyncratic for the time. It wasn't really until after she stepped back for a while in 2008 that the true breadth of those strengths started to become apparent, as she proceeded on her return to follow her muse with liberated abandon.

Initially this saw Grae broadening her musical horizons, most notably with the twisted, melodic and vividly comic sci-fi hiphop soul of 2013's *Gotham Down* and the eclectic parody instructionals of *That's Not How You Do That*. Before long she'd branched out, into sitcom, spoken word, cookery and comic writing. She became a minister, founding the Church of the Infinite You and meeting twice monthly in Brooklyn. At one point her Patreon listed 22 different job titles, for now she's settled on "multipotentialite".

*You F**king Got This Sh!t* is the second of two albums uploaded to Bandcamp at the end of 2022, following *Please Send Help: A Holiday Guide of Meditations, Talks & Needed Things*, her first new audio to drop since 2018's widely lauded Quelle Chris collaboration *Everything's Fine*. Ostensibly similar, both new works are largely spoken with occasional bursts of song. For the most part the accompaniment is minimal, piquey synthesized drones and wobbles, seductively nauseating parodies of new age ambience.

Where *Please Send Help* was pragmatic, a bleakly comic guide to surviving holiday gatherings, *You F**king Got This Shit* is largely aspirational, a series of sermons on not just getting by but existing and even thriving creatively in the clusterfuck of contemporary capitalist culture by being oneself, obstinately, in the face of all expectations.

For sure, Grae's gospel of creativity is something I can get with on the whole, even if ultimately she shows a faith in humanity and herself which I struggle with. To be fair, she's clearly anticipated and empathises with this perspective, a little. As much is obvious from the opening lines of the album, on "This Is Your Year", delivered super-straight like Laurie Anderson on Mogadon, detached, *"This is your year. Because every year..."* – she pauses for effect – *"...is your year"*. Even so, she never seems less than sincere. She believes in the possibility, if not always the reality, of actualisation.


In the affirmative: Jean Grae

The real gold comes when she's inspired to vent, finding communion in catharsis. Complaints range from specific, such as "European Beauty Standards", to the methodically universal exorcism of closer "FTP", Grae outlining in exquisite detail how thoroughly your foes should get fucked. *"Fuck that person... fuck all of the inanimate objects they've ever been in the presence of... fuck their thoughts and dreams..."*.

Best of all is "You're Probably Depressed Because Of Capitalism And White Supremacy (And The Patriarchy)", an epic lo-fi mechanical banger which seduces with its beautifully blunt diagnostics before bamboozling with a lane shift back to pure affirmation. *"Create the real you"*, she tells us, *"for yourself"*, she clarifies, *"free from capitalism and white supremacy... it's possible, because you... are all of the possibilities"*.
Richard Stacey

unencumbered by the profit motive, this coherent album of fully formed recordings seems to share little in common with such a project. The first track "Transformation" provides a barrage of overdriven distortion from various indeterminate sources. Initially, this promises that *Le Diable Probablement* will also be an uncharacteristic record for Mattin's two collaborators, Valerio Tricoli and Werner Dafeldecker, especially the latter, who is an inveterate staple of barely there free improv and modern composition. However, the next track "Hasta Que No Se Extinga" is a model of less is more, consisting for most of its runtime of creaks and medium wave radio squiggles on a tinnitus-esque bed of white noise.

The most remarkable tracks are "Recovery Price" and "Hunting Hauntologists", which lie somewhere in between these two extremes. The latter begins with a siren-like tone entwined within a glutinous web of digital signal processing bearing the unmistakable mark of Tricoli, and progresses to a passage of beats so minimal they recall the sound of a finger tapping an aux cable. The former is for the most part undergirded by a baggy chiming ostinato, ruptured by stabs of dissonance and snarled lyrics, and ends with the genuinely disarming glimpse of an ambient melody.

Daniel Neofetou

US Girls
Bless This Mess
4AD CD/DL/LP

It's not often that a record instantaneously engenders an involuntary response. When one does it's usually a sure sign that you're onto something special. Three seconds into "Only Daedelus", the opener on Meg Remy's new album as US Girls, I found myself gasping "Damn, this is so fresh!" *Bless This Mess* was created at a time when Remy was having twins (closer "Pump" samples the sound of her breast milk pump) and its songs were pieced together with a heap of collaborators and producers.

But while the lack of fixed personnel gives the album a gloriously freewheeling mixtape feel, Remy's lyrics and persona in these songs, – particularly the wondrous title track and the miraculous "Tux" – demonstrate both a sleep deprived hunger for changes of spiritual and musical trajectory – sometimes within a single song – but also a recurrent return to elemental, physical needs, and the sheer lambent wonder of the grooves and hooks always keeps you rapt.

Highlights include "Just Space For Light" which begins in radiant arcs of redemptive synth but then dives into a walloping groove a minute in as hypnotic as Stimulator Jones or Badge Époque Ensemble. "Screen Face" is a sweet, hook-laden pop shuffle about the rub between reality and pixels in a love affair conducted without physical contact. It's a very 1980s album – touched by memories of both Gamble/Huff and Jam/Lewis. "Futures Bet" rolls from self-immolating riffs into a beautiful lattice of beats and bass wherein Remy gets down to what's incontrovertible: *"The only thing that true/Is breathing in breathing out/ When nothing is wrong/Everything is fine/ This is just life"*.

Neil Kulkarni

Wanderwelle
All Hands Bury The Cliffs At Sea
Important DL/LP

Forlorn hums ring throughout *All Hands Bury The Cliffs At Sea*, creating a hollow, mournful atmosphere. Listening feels like perusing an abandoned dock, looking out at an empty marina as the wind blows by and a couple of seagulls squawk.

It's a fitting setting for the record, which is the second in the Amsterdam collective's trilogy of works focused on climate change. But where the first, 2022's *Black Clouds Above The Bows*, sounded full and siren-like, *All Hands Bury The Cliffs At Sea* broods in delicate quietude, conjuring a feeling of loss.

Wanderwelle balance emotion and the physical memory of place, echoing the themes of climate change albums like Daniel Bachman's recent *Almanac Behind*. But they take a gentle approach to their subject matter that's more like the music of John Luther Adams, expanding from the cloudy sounds of a Scottish organ that was almost destroyed by a collapsed cliff. Their music is often still, as on the album's opener "Water Hymn", in which each rounded tone floats through gradually descending tones; elsewhere, tracks like "Waves Of Ruin" take on a livelier palette, pairing crashes with dramatically shifting dynamics and a despondent harmony. Yet no matter where the music turns, it's always coloured by a sense of deep rumination.

While much of Wanderwelle's music feels adrift, when they choose to make movements, they're deliberate and poignant. In fact, they best capture the feeling of cataclysmic weather events with "Drowned Lands", a track which feels as if it's trapped underwater, plodding through its melodies. Here, they convey a lot with very little, tapping into the feelings hiding within every tiny gesture. Moments like this show that at its heart, *All Hands Bury The Cliffs At Sea* is an ode to a place long gone, an offering of space to grieve.

Vanessa Ague

Die Wilde Jagd
Ophio
Bureau B CD/DL/LP

Throughout *Ophio*, Die Wilde Jagd (aka Sebastian Lee Philipp) zigs and zags between rich ambient textures, oscillating rhythms and pop laments coloured by melancholic guitar and wafting electronics. It's par for the course for the Berlin based artist, whose music seeks to bridge avant pop with ambient and dance music – both 2018's *Haut* and 2015's *Uhrwald Orange* were formed from similar blends, creating explosive, catchy tracks out of its interwoven influences. But on *Ophio*, Philipp explores a softer-edged side of his palette, employing delicate melodies from cellist and singer Lih Qun Wong.

There's an air of gentleness cloaked around the beats that form the backbone of the album, whose primary objective is to explore the idea of transformation. Philipp's music swiftly morphs, easily moving between its signifiers and flip-flopping between styles as new songs emerge. In these whiplash metamorphoses, he finds the clearest sense of his vision. In particular, "Perserveranz", an empty-feeling track made of looming clocklike strum, distant chants, fuzzy electronics and chilling cello tremolos, smoothly leads into "Gnafna Nie", a hollow, watery interlude. Then, "The Hearth" emerges – made of creepy whispers that echo across a laidback rhythm, eventually blossoming into a pop song.

And while much of *Ophio* feels expected, akin to Philipp's prior work, the closing moments of the album offer a surprise. Heartfelt cello swirls around impassioned acoustic guitar melodies, forming a gentle meditation that fades out with a hint of melancholy. Here, the sound is at its barest, finally revealing the poignancy that has been hiding inside thickly woven layers. It's the arrival point after all the turbulence of transformation, the last few moments of reflection before embarking on a new journey.

Vanessa Ague

Yo La Tengo
This Stupid World
Matador CD/DL/2xLP

Must admit, I'd taken my eye off Yo La Tengo, partly because 1997's *I Can Hear The Heart Beating As One* is one of those records that almost destroys everything that surrounds it (although 1995's *Electr-O-Pura* will always remain a touchstone due to "Pablo & Andrea"). Before hearing the New York trio's first LP in five years, like any lazy old fan I was wondering whether I needed a new Yo La Tengo album. Listening, I curse my slackness – they're on fire here and now, reassuringly within that sound world you're familiar with but – perhaps because the album is self-produced – sounding freer, looser and more magnificent than ever.

"Sinatra Drive Breakdown" confidently rolls out on this gorgeous motorik groove over which flame-traced guitars break and surge. "Fallout" recalls *Electr-O-Pura* in terms of sheer chug and clatter but as ever Ira Kaplan's voice is a fragile, beautiful thing hinting at hooks way bigger than they're being played. That mix of understatement and craft, of pop nous and experimental joy, is key to *This Stupid World* – these songs are tight, but they're allowed to breathe, and if YLT feel like jamming out on a couple of chords for a little bit, I can't think of another band who can make that idea quite as compelling.

"Tonight's Episode" feels almost semi-improvised, with another mesmeric groove from drummer Georgia Hubley over which Kaplan laces walls of drone and tiny crepuscular shards of melodic joy. Hubley's vocal on "Aselestine" is as beautiful as anything Yo La Tengo have ever done ("Autumn Sweater" levels of grace) and the highlight here for me, "Until It Happens", is stunning, a unique post-punk pulse somehow turned into ravishing pop by a band who've clearly lost none of their miraculous touch with their sources, who incredibly seem to have an entirely new lease of life.

Neil Kulkarni

Zulu
A New Tomorrow
Flatspot CD/DL/LP/MC

The first full-length from this Los Angeles hardcore five-piece – but hardcore is way too

YoshimiOizumikiYoshiduO
To The Forest To Live A Truer Life
Thrill Jockey DL/LP

Musical improvisation, whether as a part of a structured whole in genres such as jazz and progressive rock, or as a non-idiomatic free form, is often unwittingly predefined. Years of practice, learned behaviours, composed themes and familiarity between musicians may lead a collective down the same paths, time and again. For many improvisors, avoiding repeated, predictable patterns becomes an arduous endeavour. But not for Yoshimi P-We. The work of the Boredoms drummer and OOIOO leader/vocalist has been marked by effortless creative spontaneity and unselfconscious experimentation in styles across the spectrum, from punk to gamelan and raga. The same rings true for *To The Forest To Live A Truer Life*, her second release with Japanese producer Izumi Kiyoshi.

The album flows with a sense of ease and innate extemporisation that materialise as intense stylistic twists between cuts and unpredictable rhythmic, melodic and dynamic turns within them. Simultaneously, the non-verbal, almost telepathic feedback loops found in collective improvisation are heightened by their instrumental setup. Here, Yoshimi returns to her childhood instrument, the piano, while Izumi records her playing and singing, pipes it through a modular synthesizer maze and finally mixes it with live output. Although Izumi is ultimately the gatekeeper – mutating and layering piano chords on top of vocals and his own synth flourishes – there is a considerate balance and vulnerability at play between the two performers. They respond and adapt to each other's decisions in a harmonious rather than antagonistic back-and-forth, contributing to a surprisingly coherent mutual vision.

Beyond the duo's internal dynamics, their music engages in a call and response with the ambience and sounds of the performance space. Recorded "in a café nestled in a forest in Japan", the liveliness of the eleven tracks on *To The Forest* thus offers a stark contrast to the solemn and ambient-adjacent expressions of 2021's *Live In Temple Inryo*. On the opening "YofuyO", a blissful textural bubble emerges and envelops piano splinters with a gelid atmosphere, akin to an outtake from Loraine James's *Whatever The Weather*. In contrast, the following few pieces are rhythmic, IDM-like creations. "yO Me" breaks down, rearranges and sequences piano progressions into polyrhythms that feel like a stream of endorphins. Gradually, Izumi backs away, leaving Yoshimi's phrases to come through unmodified, underscored only with a soft wave of ambient euphoria.

The first time we hear Yoshimi's recognisable voice is in the form of a fractured chant-scream on "YoY 7", which bounces around the stereo image and guides an orchestra of synth figures through jubilant, near anthemic segments. Elsewhere, "OmimiO" is akin to a retro-futuristic take on Japanese folk and vaporwave, with shimmering arps constructed from several piano licks and vocal lines enveloped in a marvellous underwater vibrato.

Rocking the forest: YoshimiOizumikiYoshiduO

Soon, Yoshimi's singing is brought to the foreground as songs start to contort around her inflection and Izumi's manipulations, alternating between warm, sincere articulations and bouts of absurdist humour. On "mull", she sounds like a melancholy soprano tortured by heavy stabs that drip with grime, bleeps and static. Moments later, we hear her soaring alongside rolling piano chords on "1.yoO". Meanwhile, Izumi goes wild on "mini yO" and "niminya", turning her delivery into cartoonish screams, meows and squiggles.

When the album starts to trail off, thrashing around mangled soundbites on "33yOng", a cathartic awareness lingers behind, as if you had just witnessed the first and only performance of a special fusion of sombre Noh and whimsical kyōgen theatre.
Antonio Poscic

reductive a term to describe what you hear on *A New Tomorrow*. Yes, there are pummelling beats, heavy riffs and guttural screams, but also weird samples, strange stretches of jazz and 1980s-style funk, lunging dub, startling moments of spoken word and rap, a hiphop sense of collage and suggestiveness. Hearing that Soul Glo's Pierce Jordan was also involved makes complete sense – this is the most thrilling thing I've heard in US heaviness since that last Soul Glo record.

Delineating everything that individual tracks do would require a dissertation. Each idea comes fully formed and pitched at your temple but often only blazes for a hot minute before moving on. So the Sun Ra lissomness of "Africa" gives way to the molten aggression of "For Sista Humphrey", "Our Day Is Now" and "Music To Driveby", which suddenly evanesces into a heartbreaking Curtis Mayfield sample. What you realise quickly is that Zulu are amazing when they're fast but even better at bone crunchingly heavy slowness, firmly in the Sabbath mode.

"Fakin' Tha Funk" is a straight-up deranged bodyslam of fury that then impossibly blends into the quiet storm sultriness of "Shine Eternally" but crucially Zulu's music always makes sense, always feels like this band is purely exploring all the music they love (and they can clearly play anything) without hierarchy or division, with as much love for 90s rap (the sublime "We're More Than This") as Moor Mother, as much affection for Neurosis as Nas, as much fondness for the poignant hope of vintage soul as the crushing bleakness of contemporary hardcore.

As its title suggests *A New Tomorrow* is redemptive and hopeful – but it's a hope earned through fury and finesse, and the album is a thrillingly dissident blast from start to finish. Heroic bloodshed.
Neil Kulkarni

Takashi Homma

The Columns

Avant Rock
by Tony Rettman

Arbor Labor Union
Yonder
Sophomore Lounge DL/LP
Listening to the third album by this Georgia four-piece, it's hard not to be reminded of the herky-jerky country rock of The Meat Puppets. Where past releases toyed with the form, *Yonder* dives spurs first into it, complete with the dual twanging guitarists of Brian 'Brain Atoms' Adams and Bo Orr, whose nasally, whisper-light voice bares a striking resemblance to Curt Kirkwood. But that's not to say the entirety of the album is a homage to the acid-baked Arizonans – moments in songs such as "Always Wear Your Shadow Hat" and "Real Beasts" utilise the hypnotic qualities of Slint, Rodan, Engine Kid and other sharp-sounding indie groups of the 1990s.

Gunslingers
Supreme Asphalt Doser
Cardinal Fuzz/Feeding Tube/Opaque Dynamo DL/LP
This longrunning French power trio are known for their dense, in the red recordings and this fourth release doesn't stray far from that tradition. But underneath all the wild guitar freakouts courtesy of Gregory Raimo lies the amazing synergy of Matthieu Canaguier on bass and drummer Antoine Hadjioannou pushing the proceedings beyond simply boneheaded rock music. Deep within the inky clamour of "We're The Real Sinners" and "Detuned For Cheap", the pair construct cross patterns in a fashion that channels the rhythm section of Peter Cruickshank and Ken Pustelnik from UK blues and rock chooglers The Groundhogs – an admirable and intriguing feat.

Heavy Metal
IV: Counter Electrode Iron Mono
Total Punk DL/2xLP
Over the hefty discography they've pumped out in the past seven years, the German duo Heavy Metal have built up a truly bewildering body of work that has more in common with the lo-fi nihilism of Cleveland proto-punks electric eels or the primitive early era of Royal Trux than anything like Judas Priest. Four years ago, the 24 tracks that make up *IV: Counter Electrode Iron Mono* were released on cassette – now Total Punk has done the service of spreading them across four sides of vinyl with every bleat being more confounding that the last. For over an hour, many popular music forms are crafted to fit Heavy Metal's antagonistic style and peeled off like a tight shirt, with everything from Madchester ("Crazy Town") to hiphop ("Ted Bundy") to space rock ("It's Only Suicide") being used to their whims. A truly audacious and wonderfully damaged release.

Hot Tubs Time Machine
Double Tubble
Spoilsport DL/LP
As the vocalist for Australian punk band The UV Race, Marcus Rechsteiner gives off the persona of an affable party animal with a penchant for chugging beer and stripping to the waist. But when paired with Deaf Wish's Daniel Twomey on their first vinyl release as Hot Tubs Time Machine, he transforms into a drily witty humourist. With Twomey's sparse and bright arrangements as a bed, Marcus waxes on about childhood traumas caused by video games, and his observations on the disappearances of all you can eat buffets in a post-Covid world, giving *Double Tubble* the feel of The Young Marble Giants' *Colossal Youth* with an extra helping of chuckles laid on top.

ICD10
Faith In Institutions
Sorry State DL/LP
Many hardcore punk bands these days like to coat their recordings in enough delay and effects that it makes you wonder what the hell they're covering up within all that racket. Philadelphia's ICD10 use a similar approach, but utilise it more as an instrument than a mask on their ten song vinyl debut. If the intent is to disorient the listener with this hall of mirrors approach to sound, the mission is accomplished with the swampy plod of the title track and the closing number "Can't See Out", a headbanger of a ditty drenched in echoing howls. For those just looking for straightforward aggro, the riffs of "Democracy" and "Simple Minded Troupe" should please fans of Swedish hardcore legends such as Anti-Cimex or Crude SS.

Stella Kola
Stella Kola
Fountain Flight DL/LP
The Massachusetts duo of Sunburned Hand Of The Man bass player Rob Thomas and Bunwinkies vocalist Beverly Ketch call upon their musical compadres to help with their self-released debut. With such a pool of talent to pull from, it's no surprise the album is such a stunner. Freckled with cohorts from No-Neck Blues Band, Garcia Peoples, Wet Tuna, Pigeons and members of Thomas's multi-limbed ensemble, the album is a tightly constructed and lushly produced selection of 14 tracks that display a deep knowledge and love for British folk and country rock of the 1970s, complete with flutes, harps, strings and a cover of "Live Your Lie" by little known Welsh rural rockers The Neutrons.

Heather Trost
Desert Flowers
Ba Da Bing CD/DL/LP
With her third solo effort, A Hawk And A Hacksaw and Beirut associate Trost toys and tinkers with many genres to create a collection of nine tunes that are daring in their execution while still being pleasant on the ears. From her headquarters in New Mexico, Trost has homespun a splashy mesh of 1980s electro pop, sultry ballads, motorik psychedelic rock and an appreciation for the intergalactic funk of Dorothy Ashby as displayed on the track "You Always Gave Me Succour", making *Desert Flowers* an album that plays out like a mixtape made by someone with impeccable taste and an even more impressive record collection.

Critical Beats
by Joe Muggs

Rosa Anschütz
Goldener Strom Remixes 2
Bpitch Control DL
The second set of remixes from Berlin based composer and vocalist Anschütz's 2022 LP contrasts nicely with the hefty techno multidisciplinary artist Métaraph and label boss Ellen Allien laid down on volume one. Aasthma (aka Pär Grindvik and Peder Mannerfelt) flip the album's ambient ballad "Sold Out" with a shuffling UK garage derived beat, and somehow manage to triangulate a space for the already folky vocal somewhere between Clannad, The Knife and the faux naif sound system pop style of the Pink Pantheress generation. That's no small feat, with Aasthma's remix maintaining the extreme eeriness of the original while making parallel world pop. Umfang, meanwhile, strips "Polished" to its palpitating bass throb and insinuating narration, making a kind of elevated electroclash for stern higher-dimensional entities.

CRRDR
Éxitos Cumbiales '23
Santa Sede DL
South and Central America love big dumb barnstorming techno, and Bogota producer CRRDR has been making a good fist of slamming together local rhythms with the old doof-doof (notably on his recent, pummelling *Damnbow* EP). There's some of that here – on "Selva En El Cemento" and "La Última Cena" – but this time round he's mostly slowed the sound down to cumbia tempo, albeit with the boom, bang and big reverb needed for massive rave sheds. "Por Detrás Y Por Delante" teeters on the edge of EDM bro swagger, but "Los Extraterrestres" dials it back just that little bit necessary to sound truly, trippily triumphant.

GIDEÖN
Storytime EP
Homo-Centric DL/12"
Veteran Brooklyn singer Mandel Turner's repetitions of *"I'm nothing without you... I'm no good without you"* over rolling 303s on "Nothing Without You" speak so potently to the

communality of the dancefloor, you'd have to be hard-hearted not to feel a pang of emotion as the track plays. London DJ and producer GIDEÖN's knowledge of house is total enough that even a tambourine cutting in can make you catch your breath; his dub chops and tessellates all the same elements, while the vocal hits even harder because it makes you wait for it. The booming, on-edge, ballroom strut of "Storytime" flips the script completely, with its spoken lyrics of betrayal, and "The West Bank" is an unrelenting slow disco dub chug with Palestinian violinist Akram Abdulfattah playing in the Hijaz maqam scale through wah-wah and distortion to construct some truly unique funk.

Hevlaran
Templates 2
Modern Fate DL
It's nice to be reassured that not every unshaven plain T-shirt wearing white guy with a modular synth in Berlin makes the same noises. Hevlaran does make Berlin techno as such, mind, with high enough production values for the big DJs, but every track feels built from first principles while packed with quirks, plus patterns that unfold on a longer timescale than the usual short loops. "Alps" and – even more so – "Road" sound like a finessed, condensed version of the aggro-funk of early Neil Landstrumm and Tobias Schmidt, while the tinkles and ripples of "Eden" are way closer to the sylvan mysteries of latterday Donato Dozzy. Most impressively, there's a common personality wriggling through all three.

Magugu x Le Motel
Kindness Weakness
Maloca DL
Cardiff based Nigerian MC/poet Magugu has stealthily become one of the most recognisable voices in UK bass. His velvet baritone pidgin tones are from the same school of restrained menace as Flowdan, with a highly adaptable sense of dance rhythm. Belgian producer and Maloca boss Le Motel here provides a Brazilian drum clatter over an electrocution bass tone ("On Topper"), a half-step pulse suggesting a soundtrack-like night ride through the city ("Kindness Weakness") and gentle two-step ("Let Me Down") for Magugu's voice to ripple through like oil. Indeed the term flow has rarely been more appropriate. Perhaps most interesting is "Blend", on which the glossiest techno sound design is applied to Afroswing minimalism for an introspective musing on self-reliance.

Chloé Robinson/DJ ADHD/Nikki Nair
Get In The Bin
HE.SHE.THEY DL
Chloé Robinson's particular skill in traversing style and tempo in DJing is to always go for the bluntest, most no nonsense essences of a given sound – latterly with her gloriously straight down the line productions with DJ ADHD. On this collaboration with Tennessee via Atlanta's rising star Nikki Nair, that means making whomping kicks and harsh hi-hats the stars of the show, embellished with grimey warbles, one note bass and nihilistically silly spoken samples (including one from a viral video of a man bathing in a wheely bin). We're in the territory of "RIP Groove", "Doom's Night" and "Flat Beat": brutish functionality that belies extraordinary skill and vision.

Shinra Knives
Protect Me From What I Want
YUKU DL/12"
A masterclass in navigating stylistic glut from a St Louis, Missouri producer via Prague label YUKU. On the first two speedy tracks, Shinra Knives collides commercial trance and EDM excess with the judder of grime and a lot of later Aphex Twin edit discombobulation. Far from being just the whizz-bang of an audio fireworks display, though, you get the sense that every element is part of a personal emotional calculus, of a story being told by the chaos not in spite of it. The emotions coalesce at the end with the comedown clarity of the muted piano miniature "I Can't Live Like This".

DJ Stingray 313
Aqua Team
Micron Audio DL/2xLP
Sherard Ingram seems in upbeat mood here. Overall, this is 50-odd minutes of high velocity Drexciyan electro business as usual, but for all the sinister conspiracy allusions of its track titles, there's less of the usual dystopian menace and more flashes of good cheer. "Star Chart" reminds that this is funk above all else, with the formant modulations of its chattering riff giving off Troutman talkbox vibes. The whispered *"You have a destiny, and now is your time to fulfil it"* refrain on the four to the floor track "Potential" further potentiates its breathless rave energy. The ping-ponging bleep melody and breathy pads of "Wire Act" are outright gorgeous. And the opener "Serotonin" does exactly what it says on the tin.

Dub & Reggae
by Steve Barker

Paolo 'DubFiles' Baldini/Al Brown
Dub Cuts
Pressure Sounds CD/LP
Al Brown was most active in the early 1970s when he cut a series of 7" singles, starting with a tune for Keith Hudson, but he was mainly known for smooth soul covers such as Al Green's "Here I Am Baby"; later on he was a member of Skin Flesh & Bones. This set of dubs with Inner Force has never been fully released before now. Pressure Sounds have had the original tapes restored by Paolo 'DubFiles' Baldini, who did such a great job on some Barry Brown sides, along with some new mixes blending overdubs, resulting in a fresher sound while retaining the feel of old timer roots reggae. Wisely retaining the vocal tracks into the dubs, the music ranges from the tough thudding dubbing of "Poor And Simple Version" to the Augustus Pablo-esque "Liquid Dream", which introduces the master dub/reggae keyboardist of Tokyo Toike Mitsuhiro on vibes.

Cream Of The Crop 2022
Various
Irie Ites CD/DL/LP
Irie Ites launched in France around 1999 as a reggae support organisation with a label following a few years later. Though they're

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dedicated to supporting veteran Jamaican artists, they've also played a key role in developing young talent across Europe. This latest release pulls together their best releases from last year including tunes from Sugar Minott, Eek-A-Mouse, Anthony B, Capleton and John Holt with more local contributions from Tomawok, Agent Sasco, Lion D and Lyricson. 25 tracks in all with nine dubs, plus a shot from Russ Disciple to close the affair.

Mystic Revelation Of Rastafari
Tales Of Mozambique
Soul Jazz CD/DL/2xLP
The 1975 album *Tales Of Mozambique* has always remained in the shadow of its epochal predecessor *Grounation*. Reissued just five years ago by Soul Jazz, the *Mozambique* set now receives the plush special edition treatment. It's almost a *Grounation* part two, with Count Ossie and his drummers continuing the never-ending hypnotic nyahbinghi roll, but here the difference is more chant rather than poetry/spoken word. It also includes tracks where the bass, keys and horns become more dominant, while the free blowing on top of "Nigerian Reggae" exemplifies the project's experimentation. In retrospect these albums can be rightfully placed in the Black consciousness movement spread around the world in the 1970s through the works of Ossie & Co, Linton Kwesi Johnson, Fela, Sun Ra, Jorge Ben et al.

The Skatalites
Essential Artist Collection
Trojan 2xLP
If The Skatalites had been playing out in Chicago, Detroit or Kansas City during their short lifetime in the mid-1960s they would have been a sensation. Back in the day ska, rocksteady and reggae might have always been thought of as poor relations to the Black musics of the US, but Jamaican music's key players never felt themselves in any way inferior. This splendid compilation, the first in a new series, is stylishly presented and eloquently notated by Tony Rounce. Its 28 scorching selections are sourced from Duke Reid's Treasure Isle catalogue, but sets of equal quality could have come from Justin Yap's Top Deck or Clement Dodd's Studio One. Starting with "Music Is My Occupation", which borrows its melody from Johnny Cash's "Ring Of Fire", through to the languorous "JFK's Memory", the collection makes for an admirable introduction to Jamaica's true foundation band.

Soul Power & Sound
Dub Procedure
Hornin' Sounds DL/LP
Though half of them were recorded at Channel One by Soljie and Scientist in 1981, the tracks here are sourced from Soul Power & Sound's only album, 1988's *The Right Procedure* on Doctor Dread's RAS label. The good doctor is now running Doctor Dread's Famous Jerk in North California selling a range of sauces and snacks! First time out was CD only but it's now finally available on vinyl, with fresh new extended mixes by specialist analogue engineer Al Breadwinner at his studios in Manchester. The set is a balance of lovers and conscious tunes, rescued from their original West Coast tinge by Breadwinner's tough and creative dub mixes such as the standout opener "I Love Your Ways". Breadwinner can be caught in live mixing mode on his YouTube channel; he's been busy moving location over the last year and promises a slew of new material this year,

We Remember Bob Andy
Various
VP Records CD/LP
The other day I read the usual useless guff about a world top 200 popular vocalists chart. Predictably Jah Bob was there, Dennis Brown was highest placed, but nowhere to be seen was Bob Andy, for most hardcore reggae fans the king of them all. So its great to see the VP label putting out this wholly deserved tribute, especially as it mixes singers from different generations. Of course *Bob Andy's Songbook*, released by Studio One in 1972, constitutes a reggae classic, with each song attaining the status of a standard over time. Bob experienced worldwide fame alongside Marcia (Griffiths), together selling over half a million copies of their cover of Nina Simone's "Young, Gifted And Black" in 1970. Difficult to isolate cuts on the set but the peerless Beres Hammond does his usual great job on "I've Got To Go Back Home", and Bitty McLean – presently, the UK's best reggae singer – delivers with "Let Them Say".

Electronics
by Spenser Tomson

Conflux Coldwell
Music For Installation
Bandcamp DL
About halfway through "The Remote Viewer", the faded industrial clang and spectral reverb of abandoned buildings breaks into crisp birdsong, a momentary daydream of what is possible in those crumbling urban spaces. The recording is from Leeds artist and musician Mick Coldwell's 2018 installation, and this collection brings together five tracks from similar projects. "Dead Air (Live Performance)" moves moodily through banks of white noise and bad signal interference, while "Dismantle The Sun" – originally a video work projected on to condemned buildings – is clammy and crumbling like old concrete. Rather than just sound recordings of these events, Coldwell somehow captures tangible residues of them, like a projector slide shining light through grit and grime and dust.

Kraus
Chronic Illness
Artsy DL/MC
Fire! Water! Air! Kraus!
Soft Abuse DL/LP
A couple from New Zealand producer Pat Kraus, both of which opt for electronics over previously favoured guitar. *Chronic Illness* seeks comfort from the symptoms of his own painful autoimmune condition, with its two openers "A Giant Egg Drifts Ashore" and "Sandcastle Abbey (Mum's Mix)" offering distraction within placid landscapes. However, as this fantasy world contorts into more abstract shapes, "Dissociating Over The Soup Course" and "Full Body Transplant" offer strangely reflective wonkiness, their irregular pulse and illogical angles recalling Sculpture at their most hypnotic. *Fire! Water! Air! Kraus!* is just as oddly meditative, but rather than Escher perspectives and unexpected glitch, "A Song From Crystal Cave" lays out a shifting tumult which progressively deepens. Moments of atonal garble still occur – "Mars And Venus United By Love" lays squirming electronics across hot synths – but these are blips in longer, more introspective sequences.

The Night Monitor
Close Encounters Of The Pennine Kind
Fonolith DL/LP
The story of ex-West Yorkshire Police officer Alan Godfrey and the Todmorden UFO is the focus of this set from Neil Scrivin's The Night Monitor project. Having discovered the corpse of Zigmund Adamski apparently dropped on a coal pile and covered with strange burns, Godfrey later claimed to have been brought aboard a silver craft where he was examined by several small creatures and a tall man with a beard. Accordingly, opening tracks "Window Area" and "Policeman's Lot" launch into *Unsolved Mysteries*-style goosebump synth. Scrivin balances earnest intrigue and pulp histrionics, like *Arthur C Clarke's Mysterious World* soundtracked by Kilgore Trout.

Jim Edgar Morgan
At Home With The Boyle Family
Goods Outward CD/DL
Leyden Jars
Forgeries
Goods Outward DL/MC
Leyden Jars are London based musicians Natalie Williams and Mark Courtney. Their new label is Goods Outward and, like their own music, it will specialise in "summoning the extraordinary from within the domestic". The first release is *At Home With The Boyle Family*, Jim Edgar Morgan's soundtrack to Stuart Heaney and Chris De Selincourt's short film about a group of artists who pioneered liquid light shows during the 1960s. Tracks such as "Seeing The World Differently" and "New Forms Of Projected Light" evoke some of that Technicolor flux. The label's second release comes from Williams and Courtney themselves; like other Leyden Jars releases, *Forgeries* is about scale, with "Tail Of The Comet" and "Feathered World" moving swiftly between super focus and macro blow-up. Like Morgan, Leyden Jars deploy psychedelic time stretches and reverses, but channel those effects via low key scuttle rather than psychedelics.

Mute Frequencies
Radio Revolted
MFZ DL
The 2016 Radio Revolten festival in Halle, Germany stated that radio art "is an anarchic aesthetic element that appears when the conditions are right". Recorded at the same festival, Laura Rogatchevskaia and *Wire*

contributor Ilia Rogatchevski aka Mute Frequencies created two pieces which get close. On "Halle Soundwalk (Ziegelwiese)", the ubiquitous sounds of life – the chatter of children and grumble of traffic – spirals into something more mysterious as metallic clang and low, unidentifiable drone creeps into the mix. While that piece feels like an extension of *Echo Chamber* – their installation exploring the ubiquity of everyday lives via a series of field recordings – "Fifty Hertz (Live At Radio Revolten)" is immediately abstruse, whose swathes of crackle and fuzz are only occasionally interrupted by peels of ominous church bells.

Neutraliser
Capsule Bowed Space
Cruel Nature DL/MC
Doesn't really go where you'd expect, this. I've got longform swathes of drone coming out of my eyeballs, many of which are completely predictable. Less common are extended pieces like *Capsule Bowed Space* which move about and actually do something. UK unit Neutraliser are Charlie Butler and Mike Vest, and here they've concocted rich layers of ambient crunch which last for almost 80 minutes. Initially, the piece is dominated by quieter moments that rumble and roll through fields of low reverb, but the thrills come when bouts of percussive clatter unleash the guitar, rising into growling electric pylons.

Prado
Machines
Buh DL/MC
Under the Blxzey moniker, London born Peru based Nicolás Prado has released two previous EPs: *Stuck In Space* and *Distorted Reality*. From the names alone, it's clear that the producer has a certain degree of techno-futurist dread rolling through his mind. *Machines* fleshes it out into loud, crunchy apocalypse; "Error" skitters around on fractured beats, building to a tantalising drop which only arrives on the following "Invasion" as it lurches on its distended post-dubstep belly. Highlight is "Fuel", whose sharp breaks elbow their way through electronic squeal like a bandsaw chewing though a modem.

Matthias Puech
Mt Hadamard National Park
Hallow Ground DL/LP
Jacques Hadamard was a French mathematician who made considerable contributions to the field of number theory. He was also interested in the role of creativity within this field, so would approve of Matthias Puech's project, which supposes: "What if Hadamard, climbing uncharted lands, was to discover not a mathematical object, but a land that he could name after him?" These seven pieces read like snippets of that expedition; "Mt Hadamard National Park Part 1" opens to the sound of urgent footsteps through brush and grass, spiked occasionally with skewers of probing electronics. The final tracks also examine scientific notions via creative means; "Suspension" bubbles and froths into homogenous tumult like particles in solution, while the longer "Imperceptible Life" begins with the chirrup of tiny crickets, gradually enlarging those stridulations into wide boom and fuzz.

Hiphop
by Richard Stacey

360 Physicals
Style Crown
Noel & Poland CD/DL/LP/MC
You've got to love the audacity of a London crew making their debut a full quarter century after first coming together with such a bold claim to nobility. Even if the multi-talented beatboxer, breakdancer, graffiti writer and sometime podcaster Killa Kela's original set stops somewhere short of coronation on this occasion they at least establish themselves as legitimate contenders with music of rare energy and passion. Highlights include "DYKWYFW" making a forceful case for their continued relevance, the bewitching introspection of "Rainfalls", and the way Kela's fiery sermon on "Not Buying It" offers up both scorn for lame-ass practitioners of modern music and scathing contempt for old dudes who refuse to broaden their horizons.

Chris Crack
What Y'All Mad About Today
New Deal Collectives DL
Much as it's possible to obsess over the disembodied text of much rap, especially from artists as poetic as Chicago's Chris Crack, studied eloquence can never compensate for an emotional void. Crack has no such shortcomings – too scarred for indulgence, he's the type of survivor who has fully realised he's nothing to lose or hide, confident enough to seduce rather than intimidate you into deciphering his allusions and non sequiturs. He doesn't wallow – this is buoyant, inspirational music. As he has it on "Profiting Off Black Death Isn't Journalism", *"I have visions through the bullshit"*, or as the title of one achingly sincere and modestly beautiful piece has it, "Grass Always Greener Over The Septic Tank".

Louis Culture
When Life Presents Obstacle
Different DL
Parrying dumb questions on the promotional circuit for this debut album, South London's Louis Culture confessed the bad habit he'd most like to lose is overthinking. At 24 he's young enough to succeed but it would be a pyrrhic victory. Culture overthinks with hunger and charm, whether wondering about *"the ratio of trauma to your happiness"* or making earnest overtures to *"Take my hand and let's dance/In this procrastination disco"*. It might be overwhelming if not for his restlessness, evidently with as much need for kicks, bravado and oddity as introspection, from the horny swagger of "Twiss" to the platinum plush grime of "Bezel".

Melo & DJ Alkemy
To Finish A Fool's Errand
Mean Business CD/DL
"I used to see the good inside these people", confesses Melo on "Work It Out", *"but now I see the evil and the fakeness when I meet them"*. Not that he's bitter, just experienced and mostly wise. You can hear the six years that went into crafting the Cardiff duo's debut in every one of DJ Alkemy's neck-snapping beats and the polished breadth of Melo's vision. "Crippling Doubt" and "Boom Ting" impress with their muscular determination but it's the sweet sentiment of "Yoko Ono" which hits hardest. *"She the path, she my goal, she my quest/And I stay a slave to the grave"* he confesses, *"Hiphop is my Yoko Ono"*.

Novelist & JiKay
4 Me
Mmmmyeh DL
A pensive, occasionally bleak but ultimately uplifting set of five tracks from Lewisham, London's Novelist in collaboration with jet trecking UK born but Los Angeles based producer Jim Kirk aka JiKay. "Drivin Slow" is expansive trap, Novelist cruising through the city contemplating the next stage of his evolution. "Necessary Measures" is its claustrophobic cousin, Nov proving he can do ordinary. "Just Do It" is a priceless grime throwback with Nov at his motivational best, and "Nothing To Say" subverts expectations both with its haunted, skippy textures and corrosive sociopathy. But closer "Peak" is the real gem, Novelist in Zen prophet mode warning *"It's gonna get peak"*, then reassuring with his vivid descriptions of a better future where his family are at peace, sharing cheese.

Onoe Caponoe
Concrete Fantasia
High Focus CD/DL/2xLP/MC
For over 12 years and seven albums London's Onoe Caponoe has been meandering through fevered dioramas fusing Lewis Carroll and George Clinton with hazy abandon, riding his own wave oblivious in the expectation his audience will catch up, eventually. His eighth album *Concrete Fantasia* feels like an artist out of his shell demanding attention, facing up to demons and other followers, capturing the manic psychedelic energy of his live shows, progressing from purveyor of interesting diversions into enlightened tour guide for a better, or at least more colourful, sequence of realities. He flows sharper than ever, from the frenetic attack of "Slayaz" to the slyly comic haunted trap of "House On The Hill" to the easy intimacy of "Outsiders", quietly defiant promising no matter how cold the city gets, *"I'll be outside with the 169 till the end of time"*.

Silencer
First Treatment
Teddy Music Ltd DL
A tight selection of 17 relentlessly effervescent bangers from London grime veteran Ted Awuah, aka Teddy Music and Silencer. The staggering 29 strong cast of MCs cuts across generations and styles for a surprisingly varied selection of moods. Dizzee Rascal dives headlong into a mid-life crisis on "Grime Ain't Dead", entertaining until it's grotesque, relative youngsters Capo Lee and Dapz On The Map outpace him for emotional maturity on "100 Autumns" and "Next Of Kin" respectively. JME, both Newham Generals and P Money all

come correct as expected. But the real heart of the album is in "Slamdunk Rally" and "Stop That", the first a brutal pile-on and the second breezy garage, both posse cuts bubbling over with the hunger of the terminally underrated, MCs such as Drifter, Jammz, C4 and Hitman who come with enough energy to prove grime ain't dead without labouring the point.

Sk!nt & Baileys Brown
Falling Upwards/Disorganised Chaos
Toe Tag DL
"I just do me", says Sheffield's Sk!nt at one point by way of introduction, *"nowt special, shout to my team"*. He's too modest, even if only because modesty itself feels exceptional as paired with the unhinged grit to tackle five of Bristol producer Baileys Brown's filthiest beats. Brown deploys harsh electronics tactically to maintain edge, from the fierce forlorn whine that clashes with the opening beats of "Blocklist" to the nasty chords slicing through canned choirs on "Talkin'". Sk!nt does well to match that intensity with frank insights into his troubled psyche and a little offbeat humour, not least the brutal diss *"You man talk shit like Dominic Cummings"*.

Jazz & Improv by Stewart Smith

Sakina Abdou
Goodbye Ground
Relative Pitch CD/DL
On her first solo saxophone release, Lille, France's Sakina Abdou goes deep into her own language. Combining compositional rigour with a lightness of touch, "The Day I Became A Floor" plays on the relationship between a lilting melodic phrase and soft-toned yet insistent trills. The overblown gust that opens "Goodbye Ground" abruptly sweeps the listener over the cliff edge, yet rather than go into free fall, Abdou glides on ariels, alternating between braying long tones and tender melody. The five-part "Planting Chairs" explores a range of colours and techniques, united by Abdou's supreme focus and emotional openness.

Piero Bittolo Bon
Spelunker
Chant DL
In stark contrast to Sakina Abdou's acoustic practice, Italian multi-instrumentalist and composer Piero Bittolo Bon attaches custom-built microphones to his saxophone, feeding the sounds into modular synthesizers, drum machines and pedals. The results, edited and curated by Egyptian composer and producer Maurice Louca, are wildly entertaining. "Game/élan" is aptly titled, with Bon's processed key taps sounding like a monstrously amplified gamelan orchestra, the clangs and bongs chopped up into demented rhythms. The piece goes on to evoke Fulani flute and drum music, as feedback tones spiral and swoop around hand percussion polyrhythms. "A Melange" finds Bon coaxing ghostly tones from the depths of the saxophone, before a rampaging synthesizer figure and cracked multiphonics take over.

Lantana
Elemental
Cipsela CD/DL
Recorded over two days in a Lisbon studio, *Elemental* finds Maria Radich (voice), Maria do Mar (violin), Anna Piosik (trumpet and voice), Carla Santana (electronics), Helena Espvall (cello and electronics), and Joana Guera (cello) summon various folk, improvisation and drone traditions. "Åkallan" opens with a steady cello pulse and a trickle of delayed col legno taps, gradually accumulating layers of vocals and cello. Gutsy vibrato vocals edge into ululations, while the cellos sculpt long tones and brisk chordal rhythms. On "Dłonie Ducha" wispy strings and sputtering electronics weave around understated glossolalia, while on "Om Sagro" Piosik's trumpet cuts through a cloud of static, giving way to earthy vocals, twittering electronics and rugged cello.

Francisco Mela featuring William Parker & Cooper-Moore
Music Frees Our Souls Vol 2
577 CD/DL/LP
On a November morning in 2020, drummer Francisco Mela and bassist William Parker went into the studio with pianist Matthew Shipp. After lunch, they repeated the process, with Cooper-Moore replacing Shipp. Cooper-Moore's lush and fulsome romanticism contrasts with Shipp's diamond-sharp modernism on *Vol 1* but proves equally compelling. "Musical Literacy" opens with the pianist working over a jagged motif, stretching the spaces between the notes with Monkian élan, before riding Mela's snare salvos and free pulse to ecstatic heights. "Mental Scenario" is a spontaneously composed ballad, with arco bass and shaker complementing Cooper-Moore's gospel meets Brahms melodicism.

Andres Røysum/Christian Meaas Svendsen/ Kresten Osgood
Music Improvised On September 23rd, 2021
Astral Spirits DL/MC
This album documents the first meeting of Oslo based clarinettist Andres Røysum, double bassist Christian Meaas Svendsen and drummer Kresten Osgood. The title may be prosaic – the music is anything but. Røysum is a terrific clarinettist, moving from fluid lyricism to raspy overblowing with ease. Osgood scuttles, scurries and thumps, while Svendsen centres it all. The inquisitive squawks and gurgles of "#2" soon take flight into a rollicking modal motif, but rather than ride out the groove, the trio take it apart, creating new forms from the fragments. The closing dialogue between bass clarinet and arco bass is a particular highlight.

Tamio Shiraishi
Subway Stations In Queens
Otoroku DL
This latest volume of Tamio Shiraishi's New York subway interventions finds the alto saxophonist in complete communion with his surroundings. His dense altissimo arcs reverberate off the tunnel walls and slice through the droning clatter of the trains. Once a train has passed, Shiraishi is alone again, calling out into the gaping silence of the tunnels. Yet there is always a sense of connection, whether it's with the murmur of disembarking passengers or a driver sounding the horn. It's fascinating to observe the different frequencies and rhythms the trains produce, and how Shiraishi deals with them. At one point, he just lets the sound wash over him, before responding with a mighty squall.

Cory Smythe
Smoke Gets In Your Eyes
Pyroclastic CD/DL
On *Smoke Gets In Your Eyes*, New York pianist Cory Smythe continues his radical reinvention of the American songbook tradition. Originally commissioned by Trondheim Jazz Orchestra, the opening four pieces are brilliantly realised by a vanguard ensemble of composer-improvisors. "Liquiform 2" bubbles and pops, with vocalist Sofia Jernberg whooping over Tomeka Reid's scrabbling cello. On "Combustion 1", Peter Evans farts and inhales through his trumpet, while the horns and strings sway microtonally. Realising these pieces had inadvertently become "oblique renditions of the Jerome Kern/Otto Harbach standard", Smythe took that classic of "weather and grief" as the starting point for solo piano meditations on the climate crisis. Through spectral analysis of the song's phonemes, stretching of the melody, preparations and retunings, he creates a gorgeous and unsettling requiem.

Julia Strzalek & Cornelia Nilsson
Scenery Somewhere
FRIM CD/DL
Recorded in a former hospital funeral chapel in Stockholm, *Scenery Somewhere* marks the first meeting of saxophonist Julia Strzalek and drummer Cornelia Nilsson. The duo respond beautifully to the room's darkly reverberant acoustic. Strzalek's alto is close and clear over the dampened rumble of Nilsson's low drums. As Strzalek bobs and weaves her way down a series of scalar figures, Nilsson scrapes her cymbals with the end of her drumsticks, the moist metallic sound contrasting with the woody tom. After building to an ecstatic pitch, the duo pull back, Nilsson's quaver snare patterns creating a sense of anticipation while Strzalek calmly meditates on a fluid line.

Alex Ward Item 4
Furthered
577 CD/DL
The concept behind Alex Ward's Item 4 project is to create a context in which the London based guitarist and clarinettist's compositional concerns can co-exist with unbridled improvisation. "Cypherned" opens with brutal prog shredding from Ward, offset by Charlotte Keefe's acidic trumpet spurts. Keefe pulls back as Ward and drummer Andrew Lisle lock heads, coming into her own in the quieter second half, with sputters and streams of flugel over Otto Willberg's sighing arco bass. The wistful clarinet and trumpet theme of "The Cusp" suggests a woozy response to "Goodbye Porkpie Hat". Best of all is the extended suite that closes the album, taking in collective composition, klezmer and black metal.

Modern Composition by Julian Cowley

Julia Bullock
Walking In The Dark
Nonesuch CD/DL
Listen to Sandy Denny's sublime rendition of her own composition "Who Knows Where The Time Goes?" and no other version seems necessary. Yet artists with other voices, ranging in character from Judy Collins to Nina Simone, have brought out different qualities latent within that poignant song. Now classically trained American soprano Julia Bullock, accompanied by Christian Reif on piano, makes it her own. Through her remarkable voice the song is felt, not just heard, and that's a special experience. *Walking In The Dark*, Bullock's solo debut, is boldly programmed. It opens with Oscar Brown's "Brown Baby," and accommodates Samuel Barber's rhapsodic "Knoxville: Summer Of 1915" and an aria from John Adams' opera *El Niño*, as well as traditional spirituals. Widening cultural horizons encourage such expansiveness, but it requires the magnetism and strength of a voice like this to hold it together so persuasively.

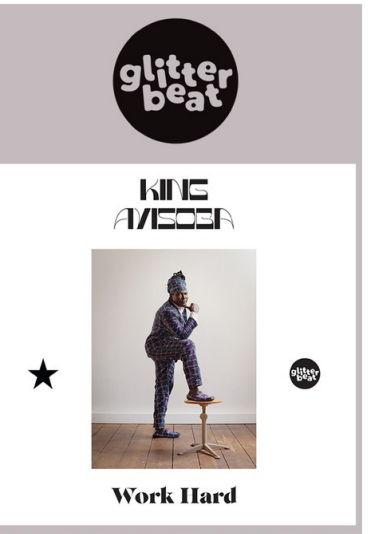
Michael Byron
Halcyon Days
Cold Blue Music CD/DL
Percussionist William Winant is one of those vital instrumentalists whose technical knowhow and accumulated insight actively encourage composers to venture beyond the securities of convention and compromise. New York based composer Michael Byron dedicates *Halcyon Days* to Winant, his oldest friend, in acknowledgement of his enabling availability and enduring brilliance as a musical interpreter. Winant reciprocates by breathing fresh life into two adventurous pieces from the early 1970s, one scored for tubular bells, the other for maracas and marimbas. He then leads a tuned percussion quartet in a radiant performance of Byron's aptly named *Music Of Steady Light* (1978). Two sharply contrasting piano works complete the programme: *Starfields* (1974), a breathlessly percussive keyboard fusillade, scored for four hands, and *Tender, Infinitely Tender* (2016), nurtured gently into being through the hands of Lisa Moore.

Sarah Cahill
The Future Is Female Vol 2: The Dance
First Hand CD/DL
The second instalment of pianist Sarah Cahill's informative and invaluable celebration of women composers extends through time, from 1687 when Élisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre published her *Suite No 1 In D Minor,* to 2019 when Theresa Wong wrote *She Dances Naked Under Palm Trees*. The *Suite*, conceived for harpsichord, translates convincingly to modern piano, and Cahill clearly relishes this music's irrepressible spirit and intrinsic liveliness. A different sense of musical mobility is called for by Wong's score, which traces the contours of Nina Simone's song "Images" between bold glissando sweeps of the keyboard. Eight further composers, stylistically diverse and with quite distinct outlooks and priorities, feature in this revelatory set. They include Zenobia Powell Perry, Meredith Monk, Madeleine Dring, Elena Kats-Chernin and Gabriela Ortiz. There are further revelations to follow, for sure.

Oliver Coates
Aftersun
Lakeshore/Invada CD/DL
While working successfully for several years as a classical cellist and music producer, London based Oliver Coates has also managed to establish a reputation as a composer possessing a rare flair for scoring film soundtracks. In his music for director Charlotte Wells's *Aftersun*, a professional cellist's profound awareness of that instrument's rich vibrational life and capacity for emotional expressiveness reverberates even through passages that are electronically generated. Detached from direct reference to the film's narrative, which involves a woman's recollection of her relationship with her father, this soundtrack effectively communicates the tensions that may shape and contort memory, when awareness of absence troubles physical presence with turbulent and conflicted feelings. Coates, it seems, shares Wells's admiration for the music of Éliane Radigue, which illustrates well how experimental work can percolate indirectly into more mainstream cultural awareness.

Cláudio De Pina
Avant-Garde Organ
Codax CD/DL
More than 50 years ago, German composer and scholar Gerd Zacher recorded albums of pipe organ music for Deutsche Grammophon that included recent works by Kagel, Ligeti and Cage. Now Portuguese composer, scholar and organist Cláudio De Pina celebrates the same avant garde, adapting for good measure a selection of early compositions by La Monte Young. Today, this music brings with it a historical perspective, while the term avant garde implies a modernist commitment to progressive cultural development that now seems outmoded. The fascination remains, however, of hearing an instrument so deeply freighted with the weight of a still more distant past being steered along unfamiliar byways, and the passion and dedication De Pina brings to this project are as evident as his knowledge and skill.

Drones And Debris
Song (After Nature Past)/Song (After Nature Future)
Owd Scrat DL/12"
The scene is a remote island castle "haunted by the noisy ghost of the natural world". A future landscape in which all that remains are drones and debris. Paul Rooney, an artist whose work is invariably spiked with serious irony, encapsulates that vision of the bleak aftermath of climate catastrophe in text printed on the sleeve of this 12" single. It purports to be a translation; a footnote acknowledges input from Homer's *Odyssey* and Lana Del Rey's "Mariners Apartment Complex", among other sources. The music



KING AYISOBA - WORK HARD
"The nine tracks are fierce to say the least...Ayisoba takes no prisoners."
--Morning Star

GAYE SU AKYOL – ANADOLU EJDERI
"Politically fierce...fragrant throughout with the acrid microtones of electric baglama."
--The Wire

tak:til

REFREE - EL ESPACIO ENTRE
"Minimalist piano compositions and experimental excursions proves potent."
-- The Observer

Distibuted in the UK by Proper.

on the vinyl is a translation too. Cellist Gyða Valtýsdóttir finds instrumental correlatives for seal songs, tidal wash, seabird glissandi and other signal sounds of the Northumbrian coast. A field recording by Chris Watson triggered this wry and evocative project, which is set to begin a second season in installation form at Lindisfarne Castle.

Roxane Métayer
Perlée De Sève
Marionette DL/LP
French multidisciplinary artist Roxane Métayer lives, at present, in Brussels. Her lovingly fashioned electroacoustic escapades are designed to tell wordless tales that transport listeners to imaginary realms. From unpromising materials such as woozily twanging strings and tremulous glides, wispy drones, artless woodwind tunes, inarticulate vocalising and inconsequential tapping, she weaves aural tapestries that cohere in improbable and strangely seductive ways. Métayer's art is at once naive and crafty. She fashions each episode to resemble storybook illustrations recalled from childhood, offering glimpses of other realities and also a different self. The appeal of this unassuming music is comparable, perhaps, to that of the vintage animated films of Lotte Reiniger, fairytales enacted in silhouette, where artifice and enchantment also coincide.

Spektral Quartet/Julia Holter/Alex Temple
Behind The Wallpaper
New Amsterdam CD/DL
US based composer Alex Temple's gender transition furnished inspiration for *Behind The Wallpaper*, a sequence of songs in which the breathtakingly adaptable string players of Spektral Quartet collectively enfold the tender voice of Julia Holter. The music repeatedly shifts its stylistic ground, refusing to settle, subverting expectations and casting allusions that temporarily frame the intimate immediacy of Holter's singing, her familiar warmth tinged with vulnerability, within unanticipated contexts. A swirling waltz, a series of lush Romantic flourishes, arch rhythms recalling Weimar cabaret are enough to send Holter's lyrically defined persona tumbling through other places and other ages, like Orlando in Virginia Woolf's novel. Sadly, Spektral Quartet played their farewell concert in Chicago last summer. They live on, thankfully, through their recorded legacy.

Noise, Industrial & Beyond by Emily Pothast

All The Heavens Were A Bell
A Wheel Of Burning Eyes
Cruel Nature DL/MC
Last night I saw Sunn O))) and my ears are still ringing – a condition which makes it a bit challenging to discern which of my current perceptions are attributable to this cassette and which are aftershocks. All The Heavens Were A Bell are the duo of James Watts and Esmé Louise Newman, both affiliated with numerous other projects in North East England. On *A Wheel Of Burning Eyes*, they conjure blackened textures on the ragged cusp of noise metal and pure chaos. Two long tracks stretch into the void: the churning, distorted onslaught and distant screams of "Usurper, Destroyer" and the charred atmospherics of "Glowing Light Of Ophanim". The sleevenotes are as mysterious as the sounds, citing only voice, springs and sound machines – "both self-constructed and commercially available" – as their source. My ears might never heal.

Brown Calvin
Dimension/Perspective
Bandcamp DL/LP
The debut LP from Portland, Oregon based producer and multi-instrumentalist Andre Burgos as Brown Calvin blends ambient electronics and glowing keyboards into mellifluous grooves. Low frequency loops build to heartbeat rhythms ringed with chromatic blur. Inspired by the Philadelphia born, Puerto Rico raised musician's transition to fatherhood while the world burns around him, *Dimension/Perspective* hits like a beam of afternoon sunlight in a Pacific Northwest winter, an affirmation that even after all we've been through, life continues to bloom where it is planted.

Dead Air Fresheners
Tales From The Elusive Hangar
Bandcamp DL
Raymond Cummings has called Dead Air Fresheners "an enjoyable enigma, with an unknowable membership, no front person and a strident anti-style" (*The Wire* 462). There is, however, at least one (somewhat) knowable force behind the enigma: Ricardo Wang, who is also the host of the long-running Pacific Northwest radio show *What's This Called?*. Like the leftfield DIY sound artists he tirelessly champions, Wang is a master of finding mystery in the mundane; of coaxing portentous drones and ominous auras from objects as pedestrian as a backyard barbecue grill. *Tales From The Elusive Hangar* opens with the eerie jumble of muffled field recordings and toy screams that is "Box Of Crows", before moving through the crosshatched rhythms and delay-laden oscillations of tracks with titles like "Deep Chunk" and "Take Your Hands Off My Time".

Illusion Of Safety & z'ev
Illusion Of Safety & z'ev
No Part Of It CD/DL/LP
In 2008, the legendary percussionist z'ev sent Illusion Of Safety's Daniel Burke several short recordings of acoustically generated sounds. In a back and forth that lasted four years, the prolific sound artist layered z'ev's recordings with his own contributions, sculpting the results into two sidelong tracks of soul-rearranging industrial ambience. "A Strategy Of Transformation" opens a holographic portal to an inscrutable yet familiar dreamscape; "Smaller Revolutions" is a gaping maw of human and bird voices, insect chirps, slamming metal and cavernous drone. A decade after its completion, and five years after z'ev's passing, this inspired collaboration finally gets a vinyl release.

Lesson Seven
Continuum Of Time
eMERGENCY heARTS CD/DL
In the late 1980s and early 90s, Texas based darkwave/EBM outfit Lesson Seven were touring with the likes of Skinny Puppy and Nine Inch Nails. After they split up in 1992, their scant recorded output was sought after by DJs in the know. In 2018, founder Scott Crow reformed the band and began issuing a spate of singles on his newly formed eMERGENCY heARTS imprint. The new compilation *Continuum Of Time* gathers 17 studio tracks and demos spanning the band's entire career, replete with cold synths, angular beats and lyrics reflecting Crow's anarchist politics. Fans of Front 242, Depeche Mode and the Medical Records imprint have 17 new reasons to dance.

Only Now
Timeslave II
Bandcamp DL
Hands down, the heaviest show I saw last year was Only Now opening for Duma and Masma Dream World in Oakland, California. With this solo project, Bay Area producer Kush Arora blends industrial noise with blistering beats, entrancing the listener with complex, yet danceable grooves that are equal parts punishing and liberating. A follow-up to the 2017 *Timeslave* EP, *Timeslave II* opens a psychedelic wormhole to alternate temporal dimensions. To achieve this chronometric wizardry, Arora has enlisted multiple guest percussionists. Dave Sharma (Sub Swara) brings his virtuosic tabla rhythms to "I Am Remembering", while Sepultura co-founder Iggor Cavalera delivers measured outbursts on "Eternal Torch". Electroacoustic beatmaker Ravish Momin (Sunken Cages) helps impart "Instinct" with an intoxicating polyrhythmic complexity. Like Only Now's live sets, this album is impossible not to get lost in.

Size Matters by Byron Coley

Tor Einar Bekken
Sea Mirror
DrB MC
This Norwegian pianist is a student of the blues and jazz in various forms, but his touch and approach to improvising are lighter than that might infer. Bekken's playing is never forced, it's always allowed plenty of breathing space. And his musical conceptions are equally spacious, giving the quiet dissonance of his playing a feel not unlike Paul Bley in ballad mode. Some passages have an atmosphere not entirely unlike the world of the Windham Hill gang, but Bekken's improvs have a persistent avant edge that keeps his work from falling into the trap of mere beauty. I had never run into his work before, but it's damn interesting.

Dirndl
The Cyst
FoC MC
On this first physical souvenir of Dirndl's Indianapolis based project for solo lap steel guitar (and all possible détournements thereof), Jon Sholly runs his axe through many

different sound spigots, creating a collaged surface with a lot of different textures. Parts are identifiable as steel guitar tones (more in line with Susan Alcorn than BJ Cole), but others sound more like bloopsy and/or longform synth work, although I guess that's the effect rather than the source. The tape is highly neat – in a somewhat twisted free psych vein – and I look forward to more.

Euphotic
Conjugate Regions
Ikuisuus MC
Very hep tape by this Bay Area trio, comprised of Brian Day, Cheryl E Leonard and Tom Djll, all of whom have a whole lot of other things going on. Euphotic are a splendid outfit, however, and sound sort of like an imaginary electronics oriented offshoot of No-Neck being swallowed by a whale. It's a very boss sonic experience, rife with pseudo-evocations of wildlife based jazz which I find immensely stirring. Good stuff.

Charles LaReau
Stasis
eh? MC
Synth player and composer Charles LaReau first gained notice as part of Omaha Nebraska's Naturaliste (along with L Eugene Methe). He's done a lot of solo machine work since then under various monikers, and has been based in Asia since 2005. This tape was assembled in Shanghai using found sounds, recycled tapes and electronics. The overall heft makes me think of Michel Henritzi's old band Dustbreeders. Not because they actually sound at all alike, but LaReau's music often feels as though it's being made underneath a blanket of dust. My fave pieces possess propulsive qualities that defy the album's title, or at least fight hard against its strictures, but my dog seems to prefer the ones that murmur like extraterrestrial ships landing inside his little head. There's no figuring canine taste!

Low/Domes
Split
God Unknown 7"
This is reported to be the final entry in a fairly amazing selection of split singles, issued over the past several years by Jason Stöll's God Unknown label. This one pairs a track from Low's latest LP (not sure if it's a new version or what) with a tune by Stöll's new post-Mugstar unit Domes. The latter's sound is a kind of overblown baroque psych-pop that bodes quite well for their future. But I'll miss these splits. Wish I'd collected 'em all!

Harutaka Mochizuki
Eugène
Lenka Lente 3" CD + Pbk
Great short solo set by the free saxophonist Mochizuki inspired by the paintings of Eugène Carrière – a French symbolist painter of the late 19th century who was in cahoots with writers like Paul Verlaine and Stéphane Mallarmé. The relatively restrained and meditative improvs share a bit of the dreaminess inherent in Carrière's paintings. The accompanying book includes an essay (in French) about the artist by Guillaume Belhomme, who runs the label. Solid pairing.

Spiders 86
Tapes 1990/2020
Spiders 86 MC
Flux
Spiders 86 MC
Ab Sofort
Spiders 86 MC
Three cassettes by a duo from the northeastern Italian city Undine. Steve Nardini and Alessandro Marchetti initially got together in 1990, and the first tape rejiggers some of their early historical material. This stuff is quietly hard-edged but quite diffuse, with near subliminal vocals emerging amid chunks of rhythm tension, light industrial surges and backwards masking. *Flux* was recorded in 2021 and is the debut of Spiders 86's new iteration. It employs some of their previous tropes, buttressed with more easily identifiable instrumental bits. The results are six mostly instrumental avant pop nuggets that have something of a Residents meets Suicide quality, reframed for a post-noise rock universe. Their latest release *Ab Sofort* has more vocal bits (both created and found), and a slightly straighter approach to framing the tunes with riffs. The use of beat sequences and some of the vocals even call to mind early 1980s Kraftwerk. Quite a nonlinear sonic evolution.

Del Stephen
Listener
Hyster MC
Del Stephen is the operating soubriquet for the artist Stephen Del Duca. His work involves combining found and/or field recordings with live instrumentation – keys, percussion, vibes, bubble machine, etc – and this single sided tape fits these various sources together like feet, gloves, hands and mittens. It's hard to know exactly which elements are which, but some of the material was sourced from tapes recorded in various parts of Canada, where Del Duca has long been based (although he might be living in the UK these days). The music here is a mix of simple melodies and rhythm constructions, larded with sounds from streets and other unidentified locales. The taped bits don't supply a sense of place so much as they suggest a phantom audience for a ghost machine performance held in some large empty building. I've no idea what the actual situation was/is, but *Listener* is a very intriguing tape.

Declan Synnott
Everything Lost In The Image
Krim Kram MC
Cork based electronic musician Declan Synnott is involved in a number of different projects including Bodycam, Mvestle and Horse. This solo cassette whips together synthesizer, piano and room recordings into a slow-winding twister of ambient design. The music (especially when piano-led) can be spectral at times, but Synnott's drones are always warm, inviting curlicues of breath-smoke.

Send cassettes, 7"s, 10"s, etc for possible inclusion in Size Matters to: Byron Coley, PO Box 627, Northampton, MA 01062, US

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Marta has been able to buy an extra shelf or two when needed, while Robin has replanned her shelving to fit her Spanish walls and her Dutch huis. He's even sent her more packaging to protect her shelves when moving to each new home.

You could say that over the years their relationship has become one of friendship. Marta knows she is valued as a customer and trusts the advice she is given.

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The Boomerang

New reissues and archive releases

Bourbonese Qualk
The Spike
Mannequin DL/LP
Second Layer
Courts Or Wars
1972 DL/LP

From the late 1970s eruption that created post-punk and industrial at more or less the same time, a thousand flowers bloomed and sometimes crosspollinated. The music on these two archive releases was recorded a few years apart, but sprung from a common moment of creativity, where obtuse and unrefined sound was given extra legitimacy and often spun into something remarkable. Bourbonese Qualk and Second Layer both hailed from South London, though they would ultimately move in different circles.

Recorded in 1984, *The Spike* was Bourbonese Qualk's third LP, the last to feature Julian Gilbert alongside the original brotherly duo of Simon and Ted Crabtree, and is creditably confounding in its tonal shifts as it builds on its forebears' work with vigour. The blunt funk bass on LP opener "Shutdown" echoes Cabaret Voltaire and anticipates Tackhead, its vocals doing similarly with The Pop Group and Nitzer Ebb. At the other end of *The Spike* is "Deadbeat", deeply ominous bass-driven post-punk that simply falls to pieces by way of an ending. In between are moments of placidity – "Preparing For Power" and "Frontline" are moody, jazzy guitar pieces – and things which are anything but. Perhaps most arresting is "Call To Arms" where lengthy passages of silence are interspersed with angry babels of distorted vocals. Only towards the end is any further sound source deployed – the kind of fearsome, unidentifiable rumbling one might associate with early industrial extremists like The New Blockaders.

Courts Or Wars compiles non-album material by Adrian Borland and Graham Bailey's Second Layer, who existed between 1979–81. Excepting two otherwise unavailable songs, everything here is already in print courtesy of the Dark Entries label and their expanded reissue of the duo's sole album *World Of Rubber*, so it's likely that plenty of buyers will be purchasing music they already own. Conversely, this is a great chance for the curious and/or adventurous to begin with Second Layer's weirdest material.

Borland and Bailey are best known as members of big coat post-punk band The Sound, but only rarely is that tendency apparent – and then, as on "Germany", it's like early Joy Division if Bernard Sumner was channelling Tony Iommi. More often, programmed drums tick jitteringly, as if they've gained sentience and been overwhelmed with nuclear paranoia; sheets of feedback, dub techniques and sampled discussion of dissection ("The Cutting Motion") add up to a portrait of a band whose short existence shared justifiable temporal space with Suicide, Throbbing Gristle and, again, Cabaret Voltaire.

Noel Gardner

Paul Dunmall/Paul Rogers/Tony Orrell
That's My Life
577 CD/DL

Recorded in the upstairs room of a Bristol pub in 1989, this burning live set from Paul Dunmall, Paul Rogers and Tony Orrell is a real find. As Dunmall reflected in a recent interview with the BBC's Corey Mwamba, the performance came before he fully committed to free playing in the early 1990s. But with its corkscrew modal runs and fluid sense of time, it offers a portent of what would come.

A master of several horns (and the bagpipes), Dunmall sticks to soprano saxophone here, spinning out a series of cyclical motifs on the 24 minute title track with an intensity that recalls his hero John Coltrane and the spiralling tenacity of Evan Parker. Dunmall's tone is well-rounded and strong, taking on a slightly pinched shehnai-like quality in the fervent passage that follows Rogers's virtuosic solo spot. Orrell – a terrific drummer who deserves wider recognition – pushes the trio forward at a careering pace, his snare and tom salvos supported by a constant shimmer of cymbals. The rhythm section moves deftly in and out of time. Rogers knows exactly when to pull back from the edge, recentring the music with a walking bassline or motivic anchor. It's an exhilarating performance, masterfully controlled, but often threatening to run away with itself.

"Marriage In India" is based around a brisk modal theme not unlike something McCoy Tyner might have come up with circa *Sahara*. Dunmall and Rogers open with a unison statement before taking off in various directions. It reaches an ecstatic pitch early on, then settles into a more exploratory mode, with Rogers taking an extended solo that showcases the timbral range of his seven string double bass as he moves from a swashbuckling display of melodic snapping, slapping and strumming to a meditation on slow and bulbous tones. Orrell makes a subtle re-entry, constructing a bridge to the final pass of theme. They soon whip up an energy field, with Dunmall soaring over Rogers's sinuous bass riff and Orrell's barrelling percussion.

Stewart Smith

David Dunn
Angels & Insects
EM Records CD/DL

Originally released in 1992, the debut CD by composer and sound ecologist David Dunn masterfully indulges two seemingly disparate impulses. The first seven tracks of *Angels & Insects* are movements of a single piece, "Tabula Angelorum Bonorum 49", based on the occult language developed (or perhaps received) by John Dee and Edward Kelley in the 16th century. Dee and Kelley called their language Angelical – later commentators would dub it Enochian – believing it to be the original language of Creation, before the confounding of languages that accompanied the destruction of the Tower of Babel.

In Dunn's composition, the Enochian names of angels are enunciated by seven voices and digitally time-stretched to produce eerie, quasi-robotic soundscapes. The album's final track is the lengthy composition "Chaos And The Emergent Mind Of The Pond". For this piece, Dunn used a hydrophone to capture the tiny yet stunningly complex sonic universe contained therein. At first listen, the difference between his digitally altered incantations and pristine field recordings is so pronounced that one might strain to discern their connection. Yet they are similar in that they both embody a desire to listen in on communication occurring on a scale beyond the human, whether celestial or microscopic. In an interview in *The Wire* 357, Dunn told Phil England about his fascination with compositional linguistics (a term borrowed from his onetime composition teacher, the late Kenneth Gaburo) as a method for exploring "the points where music and language converge and diverge".

Much of Dunn's more recent works have built on the methods used in his pond recordings, analysing the ways in which non-human forms of life use sound as an organising principle. This 30th anniversary edition is accompanied by extensive English and Japanese sleevenotes.

Emily Pothast

Kate Fagan
I Don't Wanna Be Too Cool
Captured Tracks CD/DL/LP

The enduring status of Kate Fagan's single "I Don't Wanna Be Too Cool" is such that in the 40 plus years since its first release, it has now snowballed into a full-length album. Originally released in 1981, the defiantly anti-hipster 7" was first reissued as an EP in 2016 and now comes reimagined as an eight-track LP – the all-killer solo album that Fagan never released at the time.

Known in 1980s Chicago as the frontwoman of ska band Heavy Manners, Fagan had recently arrived in the city from New York when she recorded "I Don't Wanna Be Too Cool", a playful critique of posers in her former city's punk scene (*"I don't know no rockstars/I don't snort the good stuff"*). It's a familiar sound, on the pop end of new wave, but its catchiness and Fagan's charm make it stand out. Original B side "Waiting For

The wide-ranging creative life of experimental polymath Chris Cutler is compiled in a decades spanning box set

By Jo Hutton

Chris Cutler performing in Prague, early 1990s

Chris Cutler
In A Box: Compositions & Collaborations 1972–2022
ReR Megacorp 10xCD+DVD

Drummer, composer, improvisor, Henry Cow alumnus and label founder Chris Cutler is widely involved in all aspects of experimental music, his activities spanning Europe, the US and Japan. His *Probes* podcast covers 140 years of recorded music in a conversational airing of his musicological intellect. He is a writer on music theory (his publications include the essay collections *File Under Popular* and *Not As We Choose*) and runs the label and distribution service ReR Megacorp (formerly Recommended Records), founded in 1978 to circumvent the constraints of the mainstream music industry. Henry Cow spawned many other projects – including Art Bears and Slapp Happy – and he has collaborated with Robert Wyatt, Pere Ubu and the Orchestra del Teatro Comunale di Bologna conducted by Ilan Volkov, among many others, all featured on this new box set comprised of ten CDs and a DVD.

There's no strict chronology in the track ordering, which could be confusing at first. But once listening commences, the chronology loses relevance. Taken as a whole, the contents demonstrate Cutler's continuing legacy as an innovator of composed and improvised music, played from the hearts and minds of a small but globally dispersed community of experimental music mages and magesses.

The first volume of solo works gives a real sense of Cutler's intimate relationship with the drum kit. He long resisted playing solo but with his Henry Cow colleague Fred Frith's encouragement, he began exploring the kit as a solo instrument in the 1980s. He is always pushing the sonorous boundaries of percussion – sustained rolls and refined rimshots, long, slow-bowed cymbals, metric precision versus elastic freedom, with an astonishing china teacup tapping or oil drum whacking diversity of force. "All the skills of expressive playing depend on knowing (or feeling) exactly how hard to hit, agitate or caress some resonant object to make it sound the way you need it to sound," he tells me via Zoom call. For Cutler, performing solo is a process of discovering what the instrument wants to do rather than imposing his own will upon it.

Improvisation plays a significant part throughout. This means live negotiation with an audience, where a sense of moment and place is important. "I need the acoustic of a room, the pressure of a real time event and the reactions of people who come to listen," says Cutler. All the tracks maintain an identifiable large or small venue acoustic, which constantly refreshes the listening ears. Mixes were mostly by live engineer EM Thomas or in the studio with his The Science Group (and others) bandmate Bob Drake, focusing on the space around the instruments to give character to the recordings.

The second and third volumes are edited radio shows from a broadcast for *Out Of The Blue Radio* (Resonance FM, 2002–03) in which Cutler invited a number of contributors to send him recordings of whatever they were doing between 11:30pm and midnight on one day. The fourth and fifth volumes cover the Henry Cow years from 1972–78 in addition to later projects Art Bears, Slapp Happy and Cassiber. The Henry Cow sound was constantly transforming as the line-up developed, with founding multi-instrumentalists Tim Hodgkinson and Fred Frith plus John Greaves (bass), Lindsay Cooper (oboe, bassoon, saxophone), Dagmar Krause (vocals) and of course Cutler being significant participants. The profound sense of musical fellowship is audible, the players learning from each other as the band's idiosyncratic sound developed, other members joined and new projects sprouted. The grinding avant rock of Art Bears and Cassiber is interspersed with more melodic tones, as provided by Robert Wyatt's voice on "Moments Of Delight", and the sweet acoustic guitar on Peter Blegvad's "Daughter". Volumes six to ten guide us around various line-ups, grooves and improvisations through the 90s, into the 2000s, and up to 2022.

In addition to the audiovisual material, there is also a fair bit to read, spread across two booklets. Meticulous track listings give Cutlerish insight regarding techniques and background. The second booklet is devoted to Cutler's writings and interviews, and includes an essay on music technology, with which he enjoys an enduring love-hate relationship, and extended notes on playing the drums.

Cutler started by learning The Shadows covers with mates after school. Being self-taught, he always aimed for the whole sound, rather than practising composite elements. He has no time for samplers or drum pads with no sound or acoustic of their own; the close proximity of drums in a kit means they co-resonate sympathetically which is also an essential part of a drummer's sound. Cutler developed his "electrified" kit over several years, designed to uphold the natural resonance of an acoustic kit. It includes whammy, PDS 8000 FX pedals, Boss pitchshifter, Eventide harmoniser, a pair of sticks with tiny microphones inserted in the tips, 16-channel mixer, plus a metal egg slicer (on "Somewhere In Germany"), ping-pong balls and electric toothbrush, all of which has inspired a generation of drummers with junk.

This is a mammoth project, a tying up of loose ReR ends if you like, of different music line-ups and places where Cutler has played. There is an enduring vitality coursing through each disc, as palpable in the work of Henry Cow as it is in the more recent recordings. It's a big listen and a big read, but worth every second. ○

Courtesy ReR Megacorp

The Crisis" is a little darker in tone, a broadly painted protest song against grimy politics (*"We'll sell arms if you will be our friend"*) with a cartoonish creeping bassline.

The rest of the album – the second half of which is unreleased – is more outwardly pop, showcasing Fagan's melodic strengths, which even shine through on the more shoddily recorded final track "Say It". Although their journeys between New York and the Midwest went in opposite directions in the late 1970s, Fagan's songs share some common ground with early Madonna, especially in the propulsive "Cover It Up" and "Master Of Passion". The latter pairs cheap 'n' cheerful synth riffs with a dramatic edge (*"It was more or less a fashion seduction/He liked the way I looked/I liked the way he looked at me"*). Fagan has a storyteller's voice, cleverly emphasising meaning and subtext with a pause or a switched mode of delivery. The coquettish "Come Over" sounds like an extra song written for a Bangles jukebox musical, and its magic is in Fagan's delivery, her sing-song coyness barely disguising the hysteria of her crush.

Cult classic or not, a 7" single expanded to four times its original size could easily be scraping the barrel – but *I Don't Wanna Be Too Cool* feels, if not like a 'real' album, then at least a compilation of equally strong singles by a parallel world 80s superstar.

Claire Biddles

Koenjihyakkei
Nivraym Revisited
Skin Graft 2xLP/CD/DL

Back in 2019 I was asked along to The Lexington in North London to see a Japanese band, Koenjihjakkei. I'd done no research and was taken aback by the intensity of their music. "They sound quite a bit like Magma," I commented – which is hardly surprising as they are considered one of the premier zeuhl bands.

For all their qualities, there is something quite preposterous about Magma. The French group purvey a furrow-browed instrumental monumentalism leavened with vocal chants that land somewhere between The Swingle Singers and Carmina Burana. Koenjihjakkei, however – like so many Japanese groups – gleefully exaggerate the characteristics of the music that inspires them.

In common with Magma, Koenjihjakkei (Hundred Sights Of Koenji) are led by a singing drummer, Tatsuya Yoshida – who also plays in Ruins – and they include the obligatory monster bass guitarist in Kengo Sakamoto. Their vocal incantations also follow long melodic arcs, but are less portentous and reminiscent at times of Philip Glass's opera *Einstein On The Beach*. Overall they are more mobile and hyperactive, more colourful and definitely more fun.

Koenjihjakkei's songs are packed with instrumental detail and the group hurtle through a myriad time changes per song. "Axall Hasck" is played at astonishing speed and the convoluted "Becttem Pollt" nods towards Frank Zappa and Cardiacs, while the improvised passages in the title track sound close to the Japanese free rock trio Altered States. *Nivraym*, their third album, was released in 2001 and for its first ever vinyl release, Yoshida has gone back to the original tapes, remixing, remastering and resequencing the album with overdubs from members of the current line-up including extra vocals by AH, and Keiko Komori's dazzling sax playing.

There's a feeling of exultation about *Nivraym Revisited*, but what makes the band so exciting to witness onstage feels somewhat draining in its relentlessness when played at home. For those who can stay the course, though, this edition contains an extra 20 minutes of live versions recorded at Tokyo's Club Goodman in 2020.

Mike Barnes

Necronomicon
Tips Zum Selbstmord
Guerssen DL/LP

Formed in the small town of Aachen in 1970, the group of musicians responsible for this notoriously rare German prog rock album originally kickstarted their musical career playing cover songs, first under the somewhat innocent monikers The Crickets and Love Of Tune, before finally deciding on Necronomicon, borrowing the name of the fictional grimoire dreamed up by US horror writer HP Lovecraft and featuring in many of his stories. Cloaked beneath this darker name they continued to perform as a covers group, until a decision was made to put together a concept album of original compositions dealing with mankind's destruction of the environment.

In keeping with this new direction the project was bleakly titled *Tips Zum Selbstmord* (*Instructions For Committing Suicide*) – a reference that was not meant to be read as being a guide for taking one's own life, but a metaphorical description of the mass extermination that would occur when humans destroyed the world. Replete with strange Hans Bellmer-esque cover art by the group's drummer Harald Bernhard that folds out into the shape of a crucifix, Necronomicon's debut album to the world they hoped to save was (visually at least) ahead of its time.

Recorded in 1972 under the influence of Black Sabbath, Deep Purple, Pink Floyd and Jimi Hendrix, the six songs that make up *Tips Zum Selbstmord* come across as complex progressive rants fleshed out by Walter Sturm and Norbert Breuer's electric guitar interplay, Harald Bernhard and Bernhard Hocks's drum and bass assaults, and Fistus Dickmann's domineering electric organ.

Unfortunately the project remains a hastily recorded jumble of partly realised ideas that never really fit together properly – the one exception being "Requiem Der Natur" which (despite the everpresent Focus-style operatic warbling) imparts a genuine feeling of imminent threat. Opening with a sinister intro of sci-fi synthesizer and treated vocals, it slowly unfurls into a progressive rock jam that, while ultimately going nowhere, provides a suitable showcase for Necronomicon's playing prowess.

Edwin Pouncey

Yello
Solid Pleasure
UMC 2xLP+12"
Claro Que Si
UMC 2xLP+12"
You Gotta Say Yes To Another Excess
UMC 2xLP+12"
Stella
UMC 2xLP+12"
One Second
UMC 2xLP+12"
Flag
UMC 2xLP+12"

Covering their output between 1980–88, Swiss group Yello reissue their first six studio albums on vinyl, resulting in a comprehensive overview of one of the most influential and irreverent electronic groups of their era. Originally a trio of Dieter Meier, Boris Blank and Carlos Perón, the group combined the technical mastery of Kraftwerk with the dadaist tendencies of The Residents.

These six releases chart a trajectory from scattershot experimental processes and persuasions to a (pastiche of) more refined pop styles, all with tongue firmly in cheek. 1980's debut album *Solid Pleasure* starts off as an electronic post-punk patchwork, before fracturing into long stretches of gothic drone – album highlight "Bostich" is a high drama amalgam of the two. *Claro Que Si* is similarly all over the place, with songs typically rattling through half a dozen concepts, with cohesion only in Boris Blank's process — even the most intricate compositions were entirely assembled from his library of samples. The noirish narrative piece "She's Got A Gun" points towards the pop culture pastiche that would become more present on later albums.

Coming after the commercial breakout of *You Gotta Say Yes To Another Excess* and *Stella*, 1987's *One Second* shows interesting development. A self-consciously stilted take on exotica, it's a novel reflection of Switzerland's clash of European cultures, with Dieter Meier's deep, deadpan voice as its strange narrator. The album's centrepiece is "The Rhythm Divine", which features Shirley Bassey and makes one wish they'd poured more divas into their odd mathematical mould. The synthetic earnestness continues into 1988's *Flag*, which feels more like a straightahead pastiche of 1980s radio pop, all sampled guitar riffs and 'world music' drums. "Of Course I'm Lying" is a comical Cars pastiche; "Blazing Saddles" is country gothic with a reconstructed organ part.

Each album is paired with an additional disc of bonus tracks from the same era (*Claro Que Si* features live material recorded at The Roxy, New York, in 1983). The "Dance Version" of "I Love You" is harder and crunchier, a relentless Italo banger; the mixes of "Desire" and "Oh Yeah" that come with *Stella* are reminiscent of Sparks' dancefloor friendly 80s moments, complete with accentuated vocal weirdness and gothic interludes.

This 12" series could be considered its own mini-retrospective of a parallel version of Yello who made one-off club smashes – just one of the many tangents the group's output followed in the 1980s.

Claire Biddles

In the late 1980s and early 90s Maryland outfit Moss Icon refreshed the punk blueprint via improvisation, repetition and belligerence

By Tony Rettman

Moss Icon
Lyburnum Wits End Liberation Fly
Temporary Residence DL/LP

Many years ago, in a suburb far, far away, I received the first two 7" EPs by Maryland's Moss Icon for review in my fanzine *Common Sense*. Neither record really gelled with the unambiguous hardcore punk my teenage self normally covered in my photocopied rag. In fact, both of them befuddled me no end. The music contained bore a vague resemblance to the visceral, angsty and creative second wave of punk happening an hour away from the band in Washington, DC but what Moss Icon did seemed more tortured, twisted and abstruse. A set by them in the basement of the ABC No Rio squat on New York's Lower East Side a year or so later furthered the confusion as the band performed what seemed to be a longwinded improvisation while their vocalist told a rambling, dramatic story.

When they broke up in 1991, Moss Icon had the potential to be nothing more than an interesting footnote in the underground – a gaggle of detached weirdos who found a tiny sliver of artistic freedom in the world of hardcore punk. But in the tradition of many other misunderstood artists before them, the band gained more attention following their demise than during their existence. One of the immediate reasons was their guitarist Tonie Joy and his new unit The Universal Order Of Armageddon keeping the interest alive by bringing their anarchic blur to any makeshift DIY venue that would have them during the 1990s.

The other was *Lyburnum Wits End Liberation Fly*, an album Moss Icon recorded in 1988 that was released posthumously by the New York based Vermiform label in 1993. Seeing that the 7" EPs Joy released on his own imprint Vermin Scum were long out of print, the album became their most popular and important release. It also became the archetype for many bands from that decade who found something exhilarating in its sprawling tracks and subtle dynamics, as well as Jon Vance's unhinged vocal style, which teetered between bloody-eyed rage and awkward vulnerability.

Regardless of its seminal status, the recording was apparently a shit show, rife with both technical and design issues behind the scenes, and although the ten songs from it were included on the band's discography collection from 2012, this standalone version is something of a do-over for Joy and co which restores its original sonic and visual intentions.

Despite the narrative of the band being the godfathers of 90s emocore, there was more to Moss Icon than many of their mopey mimics picked up on. Contrarily, the bedrock of their sound was more akin to the antagonistic plod of San Francisco's Flipper or those infamous noise rock pot stirrers from their own home state, No Trend. They would take a simple riff, hammer away at it until the inspiration dies, then move on to the next. The track "I'm Back Sleeping, Fucking Or Something" might be the best example of this, as a descending, stuck-groove bassline delivered by Monica Digialleonardo launches the song into a mesmeric dirge of crude, Sabbath-like guitar while Vance screams himself into an exhausted, parched heap.

In the moments when Moss Icon squeezed themselves into the accepted length of a punk song, they stuck to the script of keeping the tunes short, sweet and contentious, even if the prospect of an anthemic singalong was nowhere in sight. With no need for frivolities like choruses or solos, the album opener "Mirror" surges forth with a sputtering riff from Joy and careens recklessly for its two minute duration, collecting a head of neurotic steam until finally exploding in vitriolic overload courtesy of another manic, throat-shredding presentation from Jon Vance. You'd expect the shortest track "Cricketty Rise (Haverton Roads Browns And Greens)" to be some blinding thrasher, and even though it boils with a desperate anger, it is possibly the album's most fragile track, coming off brittle and breathless in its urgency.

But the band were at their most inventive when they allowed themselves to stretch out, as illustrated by the album's 11 minute title track. With the rolling, tribal drumming of Mark Laurence, it's enveloping from the jump, Joy's instrument emitting a dampened chime over Digialleonardo's looping bass and Vance spinning a cryptic yarn of death under the guise of a bible thumping preacher. As the piece builds with ceaseless tension, it becomes obvious some pressure needs to be released from the proceedings. When the inevitable burst of cathartic rage occurs bringing the track to an end, it's abrupt and jarring before it fades away in a wheeze of feedback.

In recent years, many bands from the 90s who owed a considerable debt to Moss Icon have had their material reissued by labels with silver-tongued publicists who have no problem revising history and throwing around terms like innovators in an effort to move units. But no matter how large the promotional budget might be to crowbar these vapid imitators into relevancy, it doesn't take away from the fact Moss Icon manifested a unique sound that challenged punk's status quo. Ignore the hype surrounding the copycats. Go directly to the source. ○

Moss Icon performing live at DC Space, Washington DC, 1989

Robert Andrews

Print Run

New music books, zines, journals, etc

Into The Groove: The Story Of Sound From Tin Foil To Vinyl
Jonathan Scott
Bloomsbury Hbk 320 pp

Musing on dreams and manifestations in the early 20th century, Fernando Pessoa once wrote, "Sometimes the best way to see an object is to destroy it." This observation perhaps best sums up our relationship with recorded music: from changes to music in the recording process, countless experiments to find the right material for physical formats as well as their unavoidable erosion through playback, destruction is a recurring character in the story of vinyl. *Into The Groove: The Story Of Sound From Tin Foil To Vinyl* is author Jonathan Scott's chronicle of this journey, an attentive, expository account of how records came to be. They didn't come from musicians, of course – they were made by inventors.

Scott traces a line that begins with the acoustic encounters of polymaths Galileo and Robert Hooke, keenly communicating the science of their discoveries and the mechanics behind the inventions that followed in the late 19th century. There's Thomas Edison's tin foil phonograph cylinders with grooves vertically cut, the wax-covered, lateral-cut graphophone cylinders produced by Alexander Graham Bell et al and eventually Emile Berliner's flat disc gramophone records.

The motivation for improvements, particularly in Edison's case, are said to be driven by finance and reputation as much as the compulsion to create something new. Conversely, the first person to come up with a method to reproduce recorded sound was a French inventor and bohemian poet named Charles Cros, who in 1877 described a process of recording sound on a glass disc. But, writes Scott, he "did not have the resources to build a prototype". In some sense, there's ideology imprinted onto records before the grooves are even cut.

It was a while before music was considered a primary use for records: Edison envisioned business opportunities as their most viable commercial function. Once music did break bread with recording technology, it was immediately transformed by it. Certain instruments and vocal ranges were better interpreted by the equipment and recording durations were defined by the format's maximum runtime. These dynamics are paralleled in the contemporary era, with radio favouring mid-range frequencies and streaming popularising shorter songs.

Yet music wasn't just shaped by material limitations, it bent to the whims of technologists too. Researchers Tilo Hähnel and Karin Martensen have described how Edison's personal aversion to vocal vibratos mean that his recordings do not accurately represent the musical milieu of his time. Ted Gioia goes as far as arguing that Edison's overtly sterile taste in music is what resulted in jazz and blues sounding so daringly exciting at their onset. When we listen to records, we're listening to ghosts: reproductions of sound, illusions of presence and, of course, ghosts of the dead. Indeed, coffins and voices of the departed find themselves wrapped up in the late 19th century origin myths of gramophone company and record chain HMV (His Master's Voice). Writing in *No Depression*, Jake Blount describes a phenomenon where studying recordings of long-dead fiddlers isn't learning from musicians at all, but from artifacts in reproduced sound. "Imagine that: The elders I've spent years trying to emulate are not Gribble, Lusk and York, but aluminum, wax, and plastic." Perhaps folk music, once recorded, is no longer folk at all.

An undercurrent to all of this production is the industrialisation of the British Empire. Scott does make a point of mentioning the subjugation of the Subcontinent as an economic convenience for the use of shellac. Edison's self-described features of the phonograph reveal a similarly colonial intent: the "captivity" of "fugitive" sound waves, "with or without the knowledge or consent of the source of their origin". This goes underexplored in the book, mind. Informative as it is, *Into The Groove* replicates the same shortfalls as vinyl's inventors: too much focus on process and application, not enough on their wider reverberations in sound.

Tayyab Amin

Heiner Goebbels And Curatorial Composing After Cage: From Staging Works To Musicalising Encounters
Ed McKeon
Cambridge University Press Pbk 75 pp

Followers of groundbreaking, genre-crossing contemporary composition are likely to be in Ed McKeon's debt. He's co-director of production company Third Ear Music and was development manager of London Sinfonietta. He has worked with Brian Eno, Evan Parker, Heiner Goebbels, Jennifer Walshe, Pauline Oliveros and Robert Ashley among others. His short book reflects that extensive experience.

Short books seem to be popular right now. McKeon's is the richest and deepest in Cambridge University Press's Elements series that I've come across so far. But be aware, it's not for the casual reader. This is a densely argued and rewarding discussion of some key philosophical and cultural concepts – in particular, the concept of a musical work. McKeon is indebted to Lydia Goehr's exploration of the work concept in her book *The Imaginary Museum Of Musical Works* – a concept which he argues was transformed by John Cage from *0'00"* (1962) onwards. Further developments led to the practice of curatorial composing, McKeon argues. He uses the work of Heiner Goebbels as a template for the practice of curatorial composing, which in his reckoning emerged in the 1960s as a critique of music as an art.

As McKeon writes, Heiner Goebbels is hard to categorise as an artist. He is represented by a music publisher, but in music circles is often regarded as "really a theatre director" – in fact, a pioneer of "postdramatic theatre". As a student in the 1970s he was a member of the leftist Sponti movement along with Daniel Cohn-Bendit, and formed the band Cassiber with drummer Chris Cutler and vocalist Christoph Anders. He developed the hybrid form of the hörstück or audio piece into a new model of "scenic concert". The latter involved an improvising group featuring Don Cherry, George Lewis and Fred Frith (1987), the speed metal band Megalomaniax (1989), and The Hilliard Ensemble (2008), among others.

Goebbels's role as Artistic Director of the Ruhrtriennale (2012–14) saw him expand the remit of curatorial composing, McKeon claims. While the work-concept established composers as the unique authors of their works, curatorial composing involves collaboration and improvisation. It urges artists to reflect on the abandonment of unique authorship and artistic medium-specificity. In the era of curatorial composing, the suggestion is, we no longer need decide whether Heiner Goebbels is really a composer or a theatre director.

I'm convinced by much of McKeon's argument, and his discussion is insightful. He perceptively comments that gallery curating has been guilty of "ocularcentrism" – the "myopia of visual knowledge" – to the exclusion of musical practices. I'd add that concert performance is guilty of sonocentrism – failure to realise that music is not essentially a sonic phenomenon. Most important, he recognises that the concept of composing can be separated from that of a musical work. I'd argue that this is particularly relevant to improvisation, where the improvisor creates a composition in a broad sense – something with meaningful aesthetic structure – but which is not designed to be repeated. A work, in contrast, is portable – whether it is a painting in a frame as opposed to a fresco, or a piece of music written for general performance as opposed to a one-off occasion. McKeon's book is a rich resource that packs a great deal into its 75 pages.

Andy Hamilton

Blank Slate: Art School Creativity From Punk To New Wave
Simon Strange
Intellect Pbk 312 pp

In *Blank Slate*, author Simon Strange looks at the impact of radical art pedagogies in the 20th century, from Bauhaus to Fluxus to the UK's art colleges, on the emergence of punk, post-

punk and new wave in the 70s and early 80s. In his view, contemporary music education is stymied by conservatism and weighed down by tradition; current music cultures have "judder(ed) to a halt". He suggests that a return to the art school ethos of interdisciplinary experimentation and unlearning could help new generations of artists access fresh wellsprings of creativity.

Strange traces the connecting threads between arts education and the cultural revolutions of John Cage, The Velvet Underground and Roxy Music – process-focused practices that became exemplified in the work of bands like The Monochrome Set, The Raincoats, Gang Of Four, Cabaret Voltaire and Scritti Politti. The philosophical figurehead of this 'scenius' is Brian Eno, and *Blank Slate* features new interviews with him alongside reflections from Keith Levene, Gavin Bryars, Pauline Black, Gaye Advert and many others.

Strange's writing is accessible, and his point of view is clear, even as the scope of his project feels unwieldy. Art practices and postmodernism, minimalism, expressionism and amateurism, defining non-musicianship in musical terms, tracing evidence of rebellious pedagogies in commercial music products, the impact of emergent technologies and cybernetics on autonomy and aesthetics... it's a lot of tricky ground to cover. Most impressive is the way Strange is able to thread multiple emergent creative strategies and revolutionary cultural moments to a coherent narrative, identifying a set of principles that could be usefully applied to a range of creative practices today.

Presented in three sections, the first looks at art schools in the 20th century, with a focus on Bauhaus in Germany and Black Mountain Lodge in the US, ideas that were picked up and developed by teachers working in UK art schools in the 1960s and 70s. Strange assembles a useful survey of institutions, linking the ideas and approaches of a number of influential educators to broader cultural engagements with multidisciplinary avant gardism in the latter 20th century. Part two sets out the four pillars of the author's *Blank Canvas* framework: hierarchical reconstruction by way of unlearning, emphasising process over product, favouring experimental practice, and prioritising non-hierarchical community interaction. Part three considers the future-facing possibilities for these ideas, and how both creative popular musicians and music educators might employ them. The elephant in the room – government funding – is also addressed. Being risk-adverse is not merely a mindset issue, but often an economical one in our contemporary hellscape of precarity and competition, now without the same access to educational grants, affordable accommodation, or an operational welfare system that previous generations had.

Strange acknowledges the white patriarchal dominance of his study, though I feel the opportunity for a more thorough critique was missed here. In his repeated emphasis on the virtues of non-musicianship I felt something, as a music educator who still believes reading music is useful, that made my eyeballs twitch slightly. But provoking music educators to think differently seems to be Strange's entire point. It turns out his recommendations are useful and inclusive, able to be implemented in multiple style contexts beyond pop and punk, not necessarily advocating for the rulebook to be torn up, but rather for inclusive principles of collaborative cross-pollination and experimentation to be given more time, space and focus.

Leah Kardos

Hit Girls: Women Of Punk In The USA, 1975–1983

Jen B Larson

Feral House Pbk 306 pp

Punk, however you define it, marked a drastic change in the degree and nature of women's presence in rock 'n' roll, but official history still tends to obscure just how broad and radical a cultural shift this was. Jen B Larson's encyclopaedic, illustrated *Hit Girls* attempts to set the record straight not just with sheer numbers, but also with backstories and present day interviews that illustrate the deep involvement of women in every regional American scene from roughly the mid-1970s to the mid-80s. Nearly a hundred female-centric groups are included, from proto-punk Destroy All Monsters to no wavers Ut.

The more equitable gender balance that defined punk was part of a larger eradication of social barriers in the rock world. "The early punk scene," in the words of Alice Bag of Los Angeles based group The Bags, "was one of diversity of class, gender, ethnicity, education, religion, sexual orientation." With technical chops and machismo also being de-emphasised in favour of creativity and originality, punk offered a perfect space for outsiders. Many of the female musicians profiled in Larson's book had never played an instrument before. Many had been active in other creative fields, like film and painting. Some published zines. Some were just "weirdos", in dress, behaviour or tastes, who would not have been given the opportunity to flourish anywhere else.

None of which is to suggest that playing in a punk band was always a walk in the park if you were not a straight male. Nikki Corvette recalls being thrown off concert bills when people found out there were women in her band: "Some guys refused to play with us, guys would stand in front yelling nasty, rude, obscene things at us." Vancouver's The Dishrags were pelted with objects onstage, not a particularly rare occurrence. Some female punks were punched out by irate audience members for the crime of being women, or for rejecting their sexual advances. Bands led by out lesbians were often subjected to a special brand of abuse.

Mary Monday in San Francisco, 1977

Most girl punks took these provocations in their stride and soldiered on, but others fought back, some with an explicitly radical feminist agenda, some with withering humour. The stated goals of Los Angeles' Castration Squad, borrowing heavily from Valerie Solanas's *SCUM Manifesto*, included "to re-educate apathetic female puppets who distort the image and impair the evolution of women... and to repair men". The Anemic Boyfriends' uproarious single "Guys Are Not Proud" enumerated the ways in which men are gross and lecherous: *"They'll even do it with sheep!"*. Bitch, from Chicago, taunted the largely male audiences at their gigs with the song "You Come Too Fast".

But by and large punk was a haven for women, with a level of misogyny that was considerably lower than nearly everywhere else. Most of the bands profiled in Larson's book were able to just get on with playing music and having fun without having to deal with many problems beyond the usual intra-band squabbles and occasional record industry chicanery. More than a few of them exerted considerable influence, such as singer Mary Monday, who is widely credited with laying the foundation of San Francisco's punk scene. And the presence of so many women lowered the average of wannabe rock star ego in punk generally. Alice Bag again: "While most of the women we auditioned apologised in advance for not being very good, all the males wielded their axes with a bravado that seemed like second nature to them. Even the lamest male guitarist would talk up his skills, acting cocky and confident, while the women underplayed their experience."

Dave Mandl

A History Of The Jamaican Recording Industry Book Three: The Upsetter To The Computer From The Black Ark To Firehouse

Noel Hawks & Jah Floyd

Jamaican Recordings Hbk 230 pp

The final edition in this excellent series is destined to be its best seller, covering as it does the most successful period of reggae music and landing on some of its most appealing characters. As with the first two volumes, the approach intersperses quotes from key figures throughout the narrative, but this time there's a noticeable increase in the hilarity, outrageousness and perceptiveness of the on-point recollections. For instance, when Bob Marley is accused of "benefitting from the fruits of Babylon", he replies, "Babylon have no fruits."

Once more illustrated by rare period photos, record labels and contemporary artefacts, the story begins with the work of

Jim Jocoy

Lee 'Scratch' Perry from his indentured start at Studio One through to the last days of the Black Ark. It then moves on to the work of Herman Chin Loy at Aquarius, whose contribution to reggae is just one of many examples of how the Chinese diaspora were key to the music's development and success. Then comes a Bob Marley revisit to Tuff Gong, both his label and studio, the chapter confirming just how important Marley was not only to the internationalisation of reggae but also to its early history.

This is followed by the technological revolution brought about by King Jammy's utilisation of emerging digital recording gear and finally the re-emergence of King Tubby as promoter of the youth in his own late digital era. To conclude, an essay by Chris Lane of Fashion Records attempts a definitive history of the development of dub, in which he concludes that the reggae subgenre was the single most influential element in the music of the last two decades of the 20th century.

As usual there are stories galore about how badly artists were treated by producers, record labels and others, but the most outstanding is the case of Susan Cadogan who, although coming across as a little diffident, was the victim of classic poor treatment throughout her career. Following the success of her Lee Perry produced "Hurt So Good", Pete Waterman, who took the single to Magnet, was bought a Jaguar by the label. He told them Susan couldn't drive – so they didn't "bother giving her one"!

Although not as significant or well known as Lee Perry, Joseph Hoo-Kim can lay just claim to having produced the first dub album, *Aquarius Dub*, in 1973, albeit as a small run blank (white label prerelease) with the official release following two years later; the album consisted of dubplates of dub versions being played out at sound systems, collating those cuts getting the best dancefloor reponse. He was also the first producer to put out tunes by Glen Adams, Lloyd Charmers and Horace Swaby aka Augustus Pablo, his debut release being "Iggy Iggy" in 1971.

Since his death, Bob Marley's name has been smeared across countless shoddy products. Despite this, it's a testimony to his enormous musical impact that his reputation remains undimmed and his relevance still resonates. The relatively short chapter dealing with the recorded history of The Wailers' Marley, Peter Tosh and Bunny Wailer homes in on the key phases and many decisions that drove their progress through the pre-Perry era, the Perry era, and then the move to Island Records and their eventual worldwide fame. Within that is a discussion of the importance of the *Live! At The Lyceum* album, with its huge hit single "No Woman, No Cry", which set them on the path to international success. 1979's *Survival*, their most militant album, provided most of the running order for the Zimbabwe Independence Day Concert in 1980. Apparently the late Robert Mugabe would have preferred "the perennially wholesome Cliff Richard" and thought Marley "too scruffy". It's also interesting to note that Island Records boss Chris Blackwell was allegedly nixing tracks for the next album *Uprising* for not being sufficiently upbeat.

A fitting finale, then, for this excellent series of books that goes beyond being an essential reference and research tool. Through the testimony of many of its main characters, it brings to life the ambience that suffused the confusing business of reggae.

Steve Barker

Away From Beloved Lover: A Musical Journey Through Cambodia
Dee Peyok
Granta Pbk 368 pp

Dee Peyok's book is a travelogue that attempts to trace the story of the country's musical 1960s. She switches freely between first person narrative, lengthy historical contextualisation and interviews with Cambodian musicians and their relatives. From well-known artists (Sisowath Panara Sirivudh of Apsara, the Drakkar band, Baksey Cham Krong) to their relatives (Ros Sereysothea's sister Savoeun, Sinn Sisamouth's son Chanchhaya and wife Keo Thorng Gnut) to lesser known players in Prince Norodom Sihanouk's musical coterie, she reaches an impressive range of people and uncovers a staggering amount of history.

Peyok's first mistake was to write this book as a travelogue. At its best, the book is a meandering yet informative account of Cambodian musicians during the 1960s and their fates during the Khmer Rouge regime; at its worst, it slips into paradigms of travel writing that are distasteful not so much for their neocolonialist flavour but for their triteness. Behold the rambling muddle of overlapping Orientalist tropes about Svay Sor, a palace musician who played in Sihanouk's musical troupe: "[He] was the vision of a Zen master. Beyond simply what I could see, it was what I could feel in his presence. Perhaps it was who he'd always been, or perhaps it was an aura nurtured while spending the better part of the 1990s in Japan, the place synonymous with Zen Buddhism."

These gaffes might be overlooked given the admirable amount of historical context Peyok provides, and one does walk away with the impression that she has done a hefty amount of research. Yet it's astonishing that Peyok can write over 300 pages of a first person narrative with only a modicum of self-awareness.

She misses an opportunity for self-reflection in Chapter Ten, when Baksey Cham Krong's rhythm guitarist Hong Samley has an angry outburst: "Why aren't you talking about music? You media journalists are always asking about the Khmer Rouge and are not interested in music. You are just interested in making money for your project and don't give us anything!"

Peyok chalks this up to bandmate jealousy, assuring him that she is doing all this to "preserve history" not for profit. This work of preservation is important, to be sure, but it's distorted by her choice to insert herself into that history via travelogue, mediating these stories through her limited interloper's perspective. The unedited transcripts of Peyok's conversations with her interlocutors would be a relatively unassailable trove of history; her paean on the merits of airplane safety demonstrations, not so much.

Despite its well-intentioned efforts, *Away From Beloved Lover* is a masterclass on how not to write about the country. Step one: try not to sound like a 19th century colonial adventurer by referring to rice, myths and god-kings in the opening sentence of your book. Step two: avoid comparing Cambodia to "a child without education", even if it is to lodge an oblique critique of the French colonial project via a Tibetan proverb. Step three: please, for all of our sakes, do not describe the sound of a gong as chinking, or fleeing refugees as illegals. These lessons can be applied to contexts across the global majority of formerly colonised people and cultures, with appropriate adjustments to the particular manifestations of Orientalism that are relevant.

James Gui

The "S" Word: Spirituality In Alternative Music
Matthew Ingram
Woebot.com Ebk/Pbk 260 pp

The latest book by erstwhile *Wire* contributor Matthew Ingram opens with the assertion that while "the 'spiritual' is a major preoccupation of many musicians", music criticism which engages this spiritual aspect is rare. *The "S" Word* aims to fill this perceived void – a tantalising promise.

The first of ten chapters, "Eastern Philosophy And The Cosmic Sound" traces

Lee 'Scratch' Perry at BBC Radio Lancashire, 1986

Steve Barker

the Western fascination with Eastern philosophy back to what Alan Watts called the "Beat Zen boom" of the 1950s. Then come the 1960s spiritual teachers and their musical acolytes: Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and The Beatles, Pandit Pran Nath and La Monte Young, Terry Riley, and so on. "To have a guru was literally de rigeur (sic) for many years," Ingram writes. He sees this influence as integral to the so-called "counterculture" — a thread that is carried through the remainder of the book, albeit very loosely.

Several of the subsequent chapters originated as blog posts, accounting for their informal, at times shambolic structure. While some feature original research, like his fascinating interviews with Hans-Joachim Roedelius and Island Records' Chris Blackwell, others are filled with anecdotes and quotes with no citations, making them impossible to verify or cross-reference. Large stretches of the book consist simply of photographs of media selected from the author's bursting shelves, accompanied by stream of consciousness annotations that make it feel like we have been invited over to Ingram's flat to listen to some of his favourite records while he enthusiastically talks over them. Fans of Ingram's long-running *WOEBOT* blog will no doubt find these peregrinations endearing.

Ingram's extended reflection on new age music, which has gone from being deeply unfashionable to the height of trendiness over the past decade, is one of the book's most insightful sections. Ingram reads the hesitance of certain artists (Brian Eno, Harold Budd) to associate themselves with new age as symptomatic not only of an aversion to corny digital flute patches, but also the genre's taboo engagement with spiritual concepts. But what is ambient music if not minimalism stripped "of its eastern and spiritual overtones"?, asks Ingram. And aren't Eno's Oblique Strategies cards just "a fun, secular version of the I-Ching"?

Weighing down the exuberance of *The "S" Word* is, however, a defensive tendency to browbeat imagined interlocutors who might be tempted to apply a feminist or postcolonial lens to any of these dynamics. The axe-grinding takes a bizarre turn when, in a blurb about *Plastic Ono Band* (1970), Ingram calls Yoko Ono's success "difficult to assimilate in today's political climate" given her "'ethnic minority' status" – as if anyone, anywhere has ever asserted that a Japanese woman can't be successful?! He then identifies Ono as part of "the ranks of ridiculously prosperous, visionary agitators who came from the Orient in the countercultural era to dominate the cultural thinking of the West", lumping the avant garde artist in with a laundry list of Buddhist philosophers and opportunistic gurus in a grossly essentialising manner.

In his zeal to dispel any discussion of Orientalism, cultural appropriation, or structural inequality, Ingram winds up doing his subject, his audience and his own book a disservice. It's a shame, because a critical study of spirituality in music that lucidly engages the complexities of imperialism and commodification would be a wonderful resource for fans and historians alike.

Emily Pothast

An overdue history of mechanised percussion and its innovators gallops through centuries while leaving room for future connections

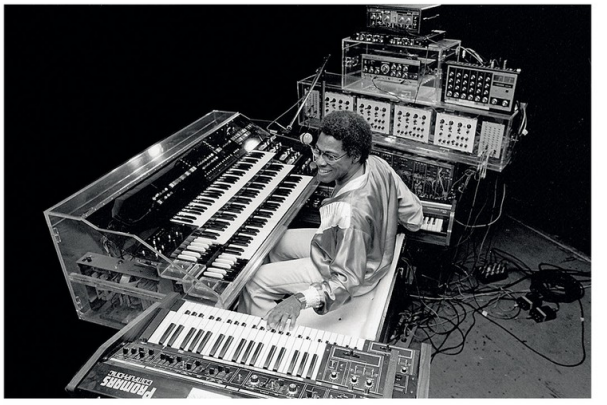
By Joe Muggs

Dancing To The Drum Machine: How Electronic Percussion Conquered The World
Dan Leroy
Bloomsbury Hbk/Pbk 336 pp

To realise this is the first comprehensive history of the drum machine is kind of boggling: is rhythmic electronic sound really still that outside the cultural canon that it's taken this long to get here? It also brings a level of trepidation as to the approach it's going to take. Dan Leroy is after all a super mainstream writer – for *New York Times, Newsweek, Esquire* and *Rolling Stone* – and the book's foreword is written by Duran Duran's Nick Rhodes. All these pillars of the establishment imply power, and one may fear this power is going to be put into giving canonical weight to the kind of easy narratives that all too often dominate these media spaces.

Anxiety is assuaged quite a bit with a look at the acknowledgements. The 130-plus interviewees in this book include the likes of James Mtume, Steve Albini, Juan Atkins, Wally Badarou, Keith LeBlanc, Schoolly D, Justin Broadrick, Bill Drummond, Michael Jonzun and, in an extremely rare interview, Eric Sadler of Public Enemy producers The Bomb Squad. OK, it's a boys' own story, but this isn't a list of broadsheet/glossy mag usual suspects, not by a long chalk. The acknowledgements also include a nice little indication of fannish enthusiasm and generosity in a shout to Leroy's parents for putting up with "all the times I played Visage's "Beat Boy" at house-shaking volume just to revel in the snare sound!".

That enthusiasm makes the story of drum machine tinkerers and rhythm obsessives absolutely rocket along, from its starting point back in 13th century automata-maker Ismail al-Jazari through Leon Theremin, Henry Cowell and Raymond Scott; then on to Rhythm Ace inventors Ikutaro Kakehashi and Don Lewis, and the explosion of programmed electronic drums into popular culture. This is a story about the machines – by EMU, Linn, Korg and the rest – and the autodidacts and avant gardists who willed them into existence, as much as the music, and the sense of excitement at innovation from both



Inventor and instrument designer Don Lewis, with his Live Electronic Orchestra (LEO)

Leroy and his interviewees is distributed evenly between both aspects.

Of course, for a book to then cover all that prehistory taking in everything from JJ Cale, Jimi Hendrix and Sly Stone through disco, house, electro pop, industrial and large swathes of the mainstream in 300-odd pages means that it will necessarily be partial. *Wire* readers may well think some of the copious space given to Phil Collins and Ultravox might have been better used documenting the significance of, say, Phuture, Drexciya or Patrick Cowley. They might also wonder why the brief mention of trap beats near the end doesn't name Lex Luger, Shawty Redd, Mannie Fresh. On the latter issue, there is at least the excuse that the book's main narrative really draws to a halt in the 90s when 'in the box' digital audio workstations started to replace actual standalone drum machines as studio staples; but for it to address the afterlife of the Roland TR-808 in trap at all without giving a nod to its pioneers does seem unfair.

Nonetheless this book manages to skip elegantly from Marshall Jefferson to Skinny Puppy, from Def Leppard to Marley Marl, and so on, packing in nerdy technical detail galore, making connections that aren't instantly obvious, and remaining readable and fun to the end. All told, that's a huge achievement. And equally importantly, in its enthusiasm and catholicism of taste, it consistently opens doors of enquiry for those wanting to follow in its wake. ○

Ned Augustenborg for Wikimedia Commons

On Screen

Films & DVDs

Hypothetical Moments: Collaborative Works (1975–1985)
Carol Law & Charles Amirkhanian
Other Minds DVD 2022, 67 mins

As a broadcaster, initially on the Californian radio station KPFA, and as artistic director of Other Minds, a multifaceted organisation devoted to the propagation of innovative music, Charles Amirkhanian has been an enlightened and enabling cultural activist for more than 50 years. As an artist himself, Amirkhanian has also made significant contributions to the intermedia domain of sound poetry, bringing precise intonation and a distinctively West Coast American slant to his polyrhythmic patterning of language.

For more than a decade, starting in the early 1970s, Amirkhanian collaborated fruitfully with Carol Law, a painter, photographer and printmaker who shared his keenness to explore new avenues being opened up at that time by video art and multidisciplinary live performance. *Hypothetical Moments* is a compilation that preserves indicative elements of their work together. Listeners already familiar with the sound of Amirkhanian's compositional work will undoubtedly find this audiovisual documentation illuminating. His performance of "Dreams Freud Dreamed" at the 12th Annual International Sound Poetry Festival in New York in 1980, which can be heard, among other recordings from that event, in the cassette package recently released by Recital, has a calculated flatness that seems at odds with the Freudian theme of the text. This DVD includes a later performance of that same work, with Law's slide projection furnishing evocative imagery and enlivening colour, in counterpoint to Amirkhanian's relatively somnolent delivery, as he sits amid shadows at a table onstage.

Three live presentations are included here, along with nine video works, freshly restored. In 1978, Gregory Battcock still felt it appropriate to open his landmark critical anthology *New Artists Video* with the question, "What is video art?" The answers provided by that book are multiple, sometimes contradictory, and the work that Law and Amirkhanian were producing during that period are comparably various, inconclusive and exploratory. *History Of Collage*, the opening video, combines cut-up textual fragments from Eddie Wolfram's book of that name with environmental recordings, plus imagery that harks back to Futurism, dada and surrealism while offering a pungent commentary on female representation in contemporary commercial advertising.

Law gained access to an early computer graphics system to concoct the lurid and amusing imagery for *Dog Of Stravinsky*, for which Amirkhanian channelled the bark of a Belgian sheepdog through a vocoder to emulate the harmonic and rhythmic organisation of Stravinsky's early work. A lively sense of humour, and ironic engagement with music's history are also features of *The Real Perpetuum Mobile*, an audio assemblage drawn from an interview with musicologist Nicolas Slonimsky, accompanied with an artfully compiled selection of printed quotations from his *Lexicon Of Musical Invective*, a compendium of critical bile directed at composers over the centuries.

Other pieces here exemplify Amirkhanian's distinctively Californian take on text-sound compositiom. So *Maroa*, taking its name from a street in Fresno, finds him savouring the springiness and punch of rhythms lurking within a batch of words, while Law's imagery traces a trajectory from Edenic palm trees to the advent of the military-industrial complex. *Hypothetical Moments* is a welcome record of the collaborative work of these adventurous and complementary artists. Beyond that it is a revealing document of its time, a decade when boundary crossing artworks were providing bold signposts, pointing towards where we are now.

Julian Cowley

Top: image from *History Of Collage* (1981); Bottom: image from *Audience* (1978)

Carol Law

Top: Negativland: (from left) David Wills, Mark Hosler, Richard Lyons, 1981
Bottom: David Wills using the Booper in a suburban California parking lot , 1979

Stand By For Failure: A Negativland Documentary
Ryan Worsley (Director)
Permanent Record 2022, 99 mins

If you know anything about Negativland, then you'll giggle when you see the FBI warning about copyright infringement at the start of *Stand By For Failure*, Ryan Worsley's new documentary film about the band. Few artists have logged as many hours on the battlefield of fair use, let alone questioned as persistently the associated legal constraints around intellectual property, as Negativland, whose sonic, visual and performance appropriations and parodies have challenged eyeballs, eardrums and moral standards alike since the late 1970s. The FBI insignia here feels less like a pro forma admonition, and more like evidence from an active crime scene. And even if you know nothing about Negativland – members of the band debate the extent of their fame in the film – you'll still have an immediate sense something is up. The FBI warning label is depicted in a sickly green, vibrating as it gets layered below rapidly cycling footage.

Something most definitely is up. Worsley directs her documentary by embracing Negativland's own "helter stupid" collage techniques. Much of the film layers eviscerated visuals into a vaudevillian media kaleidoscope. Some of this material is drawn from the band's own work, while other portions simulate the Negativland plunder-drunk ethos, drawing from the group's favourite resources, such as televangelism, advertising and TV news.

No zone is safe, not even the home that David Wills shared with his mother. We first meet him as a precocious boy when he starts broadcasting his recitation of the weather report in 1959. As he matures, so does home technology. Soon he's filming and, later, using video recorders to capture daily life. Worsley frequently reproduces segments of Wills's home movies in split-screen. The message is clear: even the most mundane aspects of human existence are technologically mediated and surveilled – and thus raw material for the madcap minds of Negativland.

Wills befriends other tinkerers and Negativland is born. We see gleeful Mark Hosler and Richard Lyons self-release the group's first record in 1980. Later member Don Joyce brings a dramaturg's clarity to their self-awareness. The longtime KPFA DJ says Negativland doesn't merely copy existing material; their parodic use is antithetical to its initial purpose.

Some sourced interview footage is by William Davenport, who directed an earlier documentary, *Media About Media About Media: The Negativland Story*. Much is from the members themselves, often filming each other filming something. In one of the film's many touching moments we see Wills record an emaciated Lyons, who is dying in bed.

Stand By For Failure proceeds chronologically but the antic presentation may confuse those lacking foreknowledge. The story of how Negativland's song "Christianity Is Stupid" got associated with a murder was a hoax they themselves perpetrated, a point touched on in a manner that could be misunderstood. A U2 parody that nearly cost them everything culminated with Negativland interviewing The Edge – which, again, may elude some viewers. Confusion, of course, comes with the territory. Jon Leidecker aka Wobbly, the group's most recent member, talks about how when he first heard Negativland at age 15, he thought he had tuned into three radio stations simultaneously.

If you know nothing about Negativland, you may still be confused at the film's end, but you'll have another kind of knowledge. Worsley successfully depicts the mix of buffoonery and consciousness-raising that define Negativland. To have told the story straight would have produced the worst sort of parody: unintentional.

Marc Weidenbaum

Mark Hosler (Wills); Mark's Mom (Negativland)

On Location

Festivals, concerts, clubs

Asteroid Ekosystem
The Great Club, Marrickville, Sydney, Australia
Julian Curwin's Midnight Lullaby
Annandale Arts Centre, Sydney, Australia

Like every music scene, Sydney's is conditioned by economic factors. Historically, the city's licensing laws, controlled by its hotel industry, favoured gambling rather than live music. Jazz and improv have had to struggle against this. But with changing post-Covid regulations, and new venues in the current bohemian centre of Marrickville, they're thriving. The scene isn't so big that it's fragmented into stylistic ghettos, and players tend to be versatile across genres. The Necks' bassist Lloyd Swanton is an example. In these two contrasting jazz/improv gigs he is the common factor, each of them totally involving.

The first is at one of the Marrickville venues, The Great Club, formerly a Greek Club – such social centres based on ethnicity are common across Australia and often host cultural events. There I hear Asteroid Ekosystem, their name a play on the group's two elements: the Alister Spence Trio (Ast), and guitarist Ed Kuepper (Ek), pronounced Cooper. Spence is a highly creative and original improvising pianist, perhaps best-known for his collaborations with Satoko Fujii; Kuepper was co-founder and songwriter for proto-punk band The Saints and The Laughing Clowns. Their quartet, with Lloyd Swanton on bass and Toby Hall on drums, locates synergies between the post-bop piano trio and pioneering punk guitarist.

The club is full, with a strong contingent of Kuepper fans in the audience, and this is a rewarding setting for him. The quartet play pieces mostly from their 2020 album *Asteroid Ekosystem*, with track titles inspired by the poetry of Emily Dickinson. The driving "A Passing Universe" is a pulsating collective improvisation underwritten by a piano vamp, with coruscating soloing by Spence and Kuepper. The more freeform "Winds Take Forests" is saturated in increasingly furious and expressionist guitar feedback. "Out Upon Circumference", with its haunting, folkish theme, is hypnotic.

After the gig, Alister Spence explains how stylistic versatility arises from Sydney's historic educational ethos: "The expected path for the skilled – possibly jazz-trained – musician was to be generally employable, ie adaptable and versatile." Many Sydney musicians play in jazz, rock, contemporary classical and cross-cultural projects – though versatility can inhibit a musician's distinctive creativity, he added.

The admirable Asteroid Ekosystem offer a kind of jazz/rock synthesis. Julian Curwin's ensemble Midnight Lullaby are harder to categorise. Their recent album *Second Sight* offers a singular vision. Material from it features in their programme for the Johnston Street Jazz series, at Annandale Arts Centre – a converted church whose resonant acoustic makes most post-bop jazz impossible, but which proves ideally suited to Curwin's slow, quietly intense music.

His label Romero Records has a darkly kitsch ethos, subtly apparent in *Second Sight*, and the Annandale performance. The line-up is a little different from the album: Curwin (acoustic and electric guitars), Ollie Thorpe (pedal steel guitar, electric guitar), Harry Sutherland (piano, keyboards), Lloyd Swanton (bass) and Jess Ciampa (percussion).

The compositions could be called nocturnes in Chopin's sense – short, quiet, meditative mood pieces suggesting night. Some are in the jazz form of head, solo, head, such as the spare, minimal "Wake The Dead". Others are mostly written: "Papillon" is a Morricone spaghetti western tribute, while the eerie "Second Sight" has theremin-like effects. "Sleep" has an open form, with repeating bassline and occasional melody.

Curwin is a subtle artist whose music, with its profound stillness, economy, intriguing colours and textures, can't be taken at face value. The pieces end unobtrusively, without a flourish. This is classicism to the point of minimalism, and it's a unique concept. I'd love to hear more of his work.

Andy Hamilton

San Francisco Tape Music Festival
Victoria Theatre, San Francisco, US

America's only festival devoted to the projection of fixed-media audio works in three-dimensional space, the San Francisco Tape Music Festival is an enduring testament to the Bay Area's history as a destination for experimental sound. This year's festival included music by recently deceased composers Krzysztof Penderecki, Alvin Lucier, Vangelis, Ennio Morricone and Jon Appleton, along with works by György Ligeti, Robert Fripp, Francis Dhomont and many more contemporary artists making use of a spatialised sonic field. I attend the final evening of this year's four-programme festival, in which works by nine composers are played in pitch darkness over 24 speakers installed around the perimeter of the historic Victoria Theatre.

The event opens with *The 7 Gates Of Thebes* (1995) by festival co-founder Joseph Anderson. Originally commissioned by BBC Radio 3, *Thebes* is an exercise in altered field recordings made when the composer was living in Birmingham, England. Bursts of language and other urban sounds captured along the route from Selly Oak to the city's open markets are mixed with minimal melodic elements to produce a churning, at times jarring mélange.

Next is *Chef D'Oeuvre* (1967), Appleton's ring-modulated deconstruction of a jingle from a pizza advert sung by The Andrews Sisters. This is followed by *Confined* (2020), a four-channel composition by Oakland based improvisor Michael Zelner. Created entirely from manipulated home recordings, this piece finds both familiarity and strangeness in domestic sounds. Nikos Kanelakis's *Spaces And Places* (2019) takes an outward turn, marrying an urban din with the sublimity of the sea — sounds inspired by and sourced during the composer's five years spent studying on the island of Corfu. The first half of the programme is closed out by Douglas McCausland's *why do you distort your face?* (2022), a ruthlessly visceral adaptation of a multimedia live work about anxiety, mental health and trauma.

After a brief intermission, the lights go down on Ligeti's *Artikulation* (1958), an early tape piece created at the Studio for Electronic Music at WDR in Cologne. Although the version played is a stereo mixdown, not the quadraphonic original, it is a joy to hear it squick and whoosh around this immaculate listening environment. This is followed by Maggi Payne's *Through Space And Time* (2022), a sensitive and subtle work of atmospherics produced on the Moog IIIP synthesizer at Mills College. Stéphane Borrel's diptych *The Lovebirds — The Inspired* (2021) combines the menacingly mirthful sounds of human laughter with rustling, then plodding percussion. The final piece is Dhomont's *Perpetuum Mobile (Phantom Rains)* (2019), which uses granular textures and shimmering rhythms to liquid ends.

The listening environment of the San Francisco Tape Music Festival is a special experience, comparable only to the immersive sound offered by nearby venue Audium (profiled in *The Wire* 427), which recently launched a Spatial Sound Residency Programme. My sole critique stems from the near thorough institutionalisation of acousmatic composition, which tends to have a limiting effect on the vantage points expressed within the field. Most of the contemporary composers on this particular evening's line-up are men working within Western academic contexts. But there is, of course, a wide world of sound beyond that which is audible from the ivory tower. In the future, it would be exciting to hear more of those sounds fill this room.

Emily Pothast

BRÅK
waterintobeer, London, UK

"Improvised music beer shop residency"

BRÅK has been running from waterintobeer in Brockley for a few years now. A welcome addition to the South London cultural landscape publicised primarily through word of mouth, the series operates a stripped back format, informal and unfussy, in which

Jazz standards, poetry and language itself are playfully – and powerfully – deconstructed by The Rolling Calf

By David Grundy

The Rolling Calf with Pat Thomas
Wigmore Hall, London UK

On a chilly January evening, Elaine Mitchener continues her longterm Wigmore Hall residency with what's surely already a candidate for concert of the year. Pat Thomas opens proceedings with a solo study in piano resonance: wave upon wave of thick clusters and repeating figures moving off elsewhere before they can coalesce into fixed familiarity. Joined by Mitchener to "explore, deconstruct and dissect some well-known jazz standards", as the programme puts it, Thomas's plangent chords and discrete electronic bloops mesh with murmured vocals that pick up ghostly traces of songs that float by – a wisp of melody, a line or two of lyric: not so much a rendition of any particular standard, as an exploration of the idea of standards in general, song form extended into something exploratory and questing, a question mark with which to begin.

From the back of the hall, The Rolling Calf – Mitchener, Neil Charles and Jason Yarde (miraculously recovered from his onstage stroke in October) – move through the audience playing hand-held wooden percussion, their sparsely echoing melodic patterns and swirling cascades quietly tempestuous. Once onstage, Charles and Yarde set off looping patterns on mini-synths, drum machines and live samples alongside acoustic forays on bass (Charles) and alto sax (Yarde), with Mitchener's declarative, soaring vocals drawing everything together.

The trio's set is structured around a series of poems and fragments by Aimé Césaire, Kamau Brathwaite, Una Marson, Cecil Taylor, Sun Ra and Jay Bernard. Rather than lyrics, these texts function as elements of musical material: markers of time and mood, vehicles for exploration, something like movements in a suite. At the performance's heart is the rendition of "Songbook" from Jay Bernard's *Surge*. Recalling Linton Kwesi Johnson's "New Craas Massahkah", Bernard's poem renders the music and speech dynamics of Johnson's dub poetry as a stripped back, ghostly echo, a memory of a social moment suppressed from history, something we can barely hear. Yet, in Mitchener's emphatic delivery – half toasting, half sprechstimme – musical sound becomes a kind of meaning levelled both within and beyond language, refusing to be contained by standard English, resisting and persisting across generations. Alongside, Charles's and Yarde's abstracted patterns repurpose familiar timbres associated with pop toward the not yet known, while simultaneously evoking the sounds of an avant garde that has too often excluded the matter of Black life, repurposed for its energies. At times like these, it feels as if the pop/avant garde distinction has been rendered temporarily meaningless.

Picking up on the carefully poised ironies of Sun Ra – *"those who will not dance will have to be shot"* – the set continues through the language of ritual and apocalypse. As Mitchener picks up a phrase from a Cecil Taylor interview – *"Hearing is playing. Music does not exist on paper"* – turning it into an incantation, Pat Thomas makes his way from the audience back onstage, thickening the texture with dense piano chords that mesh with Charles's stuttering loops and Yarde's alto squall.

Suddenly, the lights go out: in the dark, the trappings of the concert hall and the performer/stage division melt away. Beyond the visual, beyond representation, beyond the page, sound exceeds ready grasp, becoming both a historical container, and that which refuses to be contained by history's traps. Hearing is playing. When the lights come back on, music and time alike have been – however briefly – remade. There's little higher praise than that. ○

The Rolling Calf at Wigmore Hall: (from left) Neil Charles, Pat Thomas, Elaine Mitchener, Jason Yarde

Courtesy Wigmore Hall Trust

4tet2duos

saxophonists Cath Roberts, Tom Ward and Colin Webster play duets with invited guests, each lasting around 20 minutes in length.

As is so often the case with the chronically underfunded world of this music, half the improvisation resides in working with the givens of the space available: it might be difficult to fit more than three people onstage at a time. Context produces form. The duet format offers a practical response to the size of the room and as an experiment in focus, as the meshed forms associated with more usual medium-large size improvisation are replaced by a focus on the dialogue and dialectic of personalities meshing or clashing, the particular pleasure – and tension – of each set residing in how well those two personalities combine.

"BRÅK", explains Webster, "is a word that means noise in Norwegian, and also argument in Swedish, [but] some of the music we play is actually not noisy at all." January's iteration offers a roughly equal balance between delicacy and grit, with Ward, on alto and clarinet, joined by Andrew Woodhead on electronics, Roberts, on baritone, by cellist Khabat Abas, and Webster, again on alto, by guitarist Roberto Sassi. The night begins with Woodhead's modest tabletop set-up – Korg Monotron, stylophone, laptop – emitting slide and whoosh, crackle and scratch, Ward's alto, thick with multiphonics, shooting up to altissimo then dragging down to a low burr. High alto and electronics unite to produce difference tones in paint-peeling stasis, before Ward switches to clarinet over gentle burbles and rhythmic pulses: a cloud of ruminative dial tones, a trace of melody as if muttered under the breath. With Ward back on alto, a final passage of tweet and bleep coalesces into a concluding note somewhere between a crackle and a squeak.

In the second set, Roberts's surging baritone is both forcefully declarative and tentative, Abas's fingertip cello softly shuddering and scraping, swooping and lunging. A thunderous baritone blast is met with the quietest of cello harmonics: the music's tensile and dense with expectation, a creaking chair from the back of room briefly joining as an impromptu third voice. Instrumental texture extends in unexpected ways: Roberts strikes the baritone with ringed finger; Abas brings out a bow covered in gently shaking gold rings, strikes the strings with drum beaters, saws at the tailpiece, scrapes and taps her instrument's wood, the cello transforming into malfunctioning clock, thrumming lute and pattering drum, in a modest and very effective kind of magic.

For the third set, Webster and Sassi erupt into finger-flying free jazz territory, Sassi's bevy of pedals adding glitches, loops and effects that exacerbate the hyperactive clatter. Chorused drone and held, circular-breathed note afford a temporary plateau. Webster traces a sombre melody in rising and falling cadence, pealing out over clamorous, high-pitched guitar distortion. Joint wails rising and falling, a sudden volume drop, Webster's alto with low, breathy thuds before the thrashing, paint-peeling mode of the opening returns to end it with a bang and a short follow-up: juddering, stuttering, twitching, blasting, a fine way to begin the year.

David Grundy

Infrequent Seams
Roulette, New York, US

Infrequent Seams follows the voracious appetite of composer, consumer, bassist, record label runner, event producer, and all-around aesthete James Ilgenfritz. He opened the Infrequent umbrella 15 years ago and continues as director, promoter and – as he jokes from the stage at Roulette – his sole assistant.

The evening, the first of a two night run at the Brooklyn venue, is co-produced with the composer collective Anti-Social Music and ranges from rarely heard 20th century works to exciting premieres. The sextet Either/Or play 1960s works by Talib Rasul Hakim – brother of jazz drummer Joe Chambers – one of them benefiting from the exquisite tone and precision of Jonathan Finlayson's trumpet.

An ethereal solo cello with tasteful reverb and demanding arco, *en tiempos de voz pasiva*, composed by James Diaz in 2010, is beautifully played by John Popham employing deep bass and soft harmonics in spacious dynamics and moments of silence. The ensemble end the set with Katherine Young's dark, moody and occasionally violent *For Autonauts, For Travelers* (2019).

Ilgenfritz's appears on stage with the improvising group 4tet2duos in a perfect balance of sound and music. The latter is always moving, yet never quickly, with lots of reediness from accordion and bass clarinet (plus Lucie Vitková's small, double-reed flute). Then pianist Eli Wallace, who recently released a record on the Infrequent Seams label, bows strings using horse hair without the wand, demonstrating that preparations don't have to be cacophonous, they can just be beautiful.

The long first evening ends with a Ghost Ensemble premiere that doesn't demand close listening but does reward it. Ben Richter's *Rewild* starts as a strictly metred scattering of percussive noises and melodic fragments but comes in short order to resemble an old, lost folk song found and slowed, before dissolving into tonal waves. Two basses, cello and viola, oboe, flute and Richter's accordion carry us toward midnight rather dreamily.

The second night is a memorial to composer and innovator Richard Teitelbaum, who died in 2020 at the age of 80. The evening opens with an improv trio of his frequent collaborator Alvin Curran, his student Leila Bordreuil and Miguel Frasconi working with Teitelbaum's Ableton patches. Curran's samples of pop culture detritus ride atop a blur of cello and electronics. As he moves his attention to gentle piano lines and then the shofar, the sound turns to a lovely drone.

A recording of Teitelbaum, drummer Andrew Cyrille and guitarist Elliott Sharp issued by Infrequent Seams was one of the more fascinating releases of 2022. Cyrille and Sharp reconvene, joined by Curran and Ilgenfritz, to pay their respects in an articulate density. Ghost Ensemble then return with the premiere of Catherine Lamb's *interius/exterius* with its composer on viola. Extended dissonances by the ensemble are decorated with delicate notes from Lucie Stavros's harp. Eventually, the harp gathers mass, the other instruments drop out and the piece resolves in a beautiful, asymmetrical, descending solo.

After the Lamb piece, the stillness of Teitelbaum's *Threshold*, with prerecorded insect and flowing water sounds, is stunning – not to hear it but to be within in it. The music isn't about any instrument; it flows like the creek in the recording. After about half an hour, the lights turn from red to blue and the rest of the musicians slowly join the ensemble onstage and around the room for Pauline Oliveros's *NY Air (Arctic Air)*. The poet Ione (Oliveros's partner and frequent collaborator) appears via video link with a homily: *"I know, I am listening, no arguments, my body is sound, listening guides my body…"*. Where there had been no divide between instruments, now, it seems, there is no division between sound waves and the other waves in the air, between the room and the experience of being in the room, between Brooklyn and Ione in the ether.

The two nights hit several musical highs, but maybe better than those is the wide grin

Todd Weinstein

on Ilgenfritz's face as he shares the stage with Curran, Cyrille and Sharp, three legends of different spheres. He no doubt worked hard to put the two nights together, but even harder these past 20 years in New York to get to this point. His bliss is infectious.

Kurt Gottschalk

Rubbish Music
Cafe Oto, London, UK

Electronics duo Kate Carr and Iain Chambers (from Langham Research Centre) teamed up in early 2022 as Rubbish music. They're not the first people to turn items of rubbish into musical instruments, in fact it would probably be unusual to attend a Cafe Oto gig without any waste on stage. But Carr and Chambers have mastered a distinctive style of random objects recycled as elegant minimalist music matter.

They gather their waste objects from around whatever venue they are playing in, and Oto being in Dalston, their two stage tables provide an insight to its particular brand of rubbish. They each have a rather shiny-looking dustbin hooked up with contact mics. Carr's dustbin serves as bass, whereas Chambers strokes the top of the bin with its lid for a sustained twangling. Carr has an array of plastic bottles with which she squirts various air streams across the tip of her microphone for a super-controlled bass tip-up effect. Chambers plucks the bars of a dirty-looking oven shelf similarly connected via contact mic, then scrunches baking parchment or onion peel in his left hand close to his mic while over-controlling the knobs on his small notepad mixer, multi-band filter, delay, Boss looping pedal, four simple items of electronics.

Different plastic bags offer surprisingly varied textures of crackling. Carr has a laptop playing loops from Fruity Loops software, triggered from a small keyboard interface. The whole piece is underpinned by the hypnotic looping of slowed down train recordings, which set a gentle eupneic rhythm determined by the cycling speed of the looped recordings. Just when I was starting to think about the possibility of more abrupt percussive sounds, Carr obliges with an old rusty bell, in a distinct three-two-three repeated rhythm, and drops plastic bottles into her bin with a range of sharp thuds. Chambers plays a chip of Parisian tile from some crumbling brutalist building.

The concert is beautiful to watch. Sure, there's a point to it all. Carr's background is in creating sound essays which focus on how we navigate any space we might find ourselves in, through a series of instinctive sonic negotiations between passers-by. We get that we have to think about our waste these days. But the joy of this concert is not so much that it's played on rubbish, it's the aesthetics of their music, the space, the sheer intensity with which they perform each object, the considered detail of how to play each item for its best sound, the grave distortions, high scintillations and momentary feedback.It's how Carr and Chambers communicate with each other, intermittently standing back to let the other come forward, or cue synchronisations, always leaving plenty of breathing and reflecting space. All this creates an experience that is visually and sonically mesmerizing.

Both players are experienced and dedicated field recordists. Chambers's previous work has focussed on the sound of brutalist architecture. Much of Carr's recordings comment in some social or political way on the environment in which they were recorded. They have both founded new labels to promote music from field recordings, Persistence Of Sound and Flaming Pines. Their next concert, at London's Barbican, will invite the audience to join in an orchestra of rubbish music. Long may they recycle.

Jo Hutton

Winter Jazzfest 2023
Various venues, New York, US

Is geography destiny? The changes to the Winter Jazzfest over the last ten years make that case. As it has grown in size and duration, so it has expanded in space, but done so like an ageing star, increasing reach while losing a firm connection to its core. The Friday and Saturday Marathons are still the central events, with dozens of sets at several clubs in Manhattan (Friday) and Brooklyn the following night. The Manhattan music is no longer mainly in Greenwich Village, meaning no more hitting several clubs like it was 52nd Street and jazz was central to pop culture and nightlife.

At the northern extreme, Pyroclastic Records hold the first night of their own mini-festival inside Jazzfest at The Jazz Gallery, opening with Chris Lightcap's Superette Deluxe. The group exemplify the range of both the label and Jazzfest: not jazz but improvising rock, mixing West Africa and Americana, playing with a joyful ensemble concept. Solos are brief, if there are any, mostly going to the virtuosic organ playing of Brian Marsella. It's a stylish and rambunctious start, made more personable by leader Lightcap's modesty.

Afterward, it takes a subway ride to get from there to the heart of the Village. Doug Wamble's personal take on the blues at Zinc Bar and a showcase for Parisian flavoured jazz at The Bitter End are at capacity, with a long queue waiting out in the cold to enter, the music pumping out onto the pavement. At (le) poisson rouge, the crowd for Donny McCaslin gradually thin out during Joel Ross's *The Parable Of The Poet* set. More beautiful even than the Blue Note album, the extended, quiet focus of the music and the measured but inexorable pace stir up deep emotions and experiences, things buried in the genes. Gabrielle Garo plays soulful, harmonically rich flute solos, and Immanuel Wilkins, who opened the night at the same venue, plays a long solo that opens with a haunting tone and winds into a caustic fire, filling each pulse with what seems an infinite slicing of notes. It's the height and essence of the live jazz experience, at least for those listening and not staring at their phones.

Saturday night has some of that too, all the music happening within a walking radius in Williamsburg. There's the canned DJing of Gilles Peterson – the exact opposite of the live jazz experience – at Superior Ingredients, but there's also Jamaaladeen Tacuma, Makaya McCraven and Irreversible Entanglements, with more soul/acid/etc jazz across the street at Brooklyn Bowl. Simultaneously six blocks down Wythe Avenue, there's freer, more acoustic music at National Sawdust and Loove Labs. It's all about location.

The grooves from Tacuma and McCraven are excellent and the club is near full. It's a party atmosphere. Bassist Tacuma leads his Jet Set band with trumpeter Paul Geiss, reedist Lee Odom, second bassist Brandon Lopez and drummer Billy Martin. Tacuma charges ahead with the funk, while the rest of the band strive to catch up and stay with him, not altogether successfully – Martin is closest, the horns mostly afterthoughts. Beyond Tacuma's sheer greatness, it's not great, though the energy is fun. One longs for greater nuance than the dance club sound though.

The music has more light and space down the street, although there's only a grudging amount of room for listeners for William Parker's trio with Dave Burrell and William Hooker at Loove. Mostly shut out of that intimate conversation, a stone's throw away at National Sawdust the acoustics are made for listening, and the crowd is wrapped up in Surya Botofasina's "Sounds For Meghan Stabile", the head of Revive Music Group, who ended her life last summer. With guitarist Nate Mercereau and percussionist Carlos Niño, and Botofasina at the keyboards, the music has a surface of ambient chords and washes, but like Ross the night before the quiet and gentleness on top is a pathway into some haunting and, tonight, wrenching depths. The sense of loss pours through, the experience moving beyond anything one had anticipated. The following set, from saxophonist Zoh Amba and drummer Chris Corsano, is a disappointment, being close to entirely derivative of Albert Ayler, as if gestures are all that's needed.

George Grella

I Will Greet The Sun Again
Iklectik, London, U

Roshi Nasehi and Fari Bradley have programmed two fundraising evenings of experimental music and theatre in solidarity with Iranian protesters. The first happened the day before in Camden People's Theatre and tonight, with more emphasis on music, we're at Iklectik on London's South Bank. Both women are Iranian – Nasehi was born in Wales, but speaks Persian well: "When I speak Farsi my parents laugh at my Welsh accent."

Iran has a highly sophisticated culture and is perhaps the most secular state in the Middle East. But Iranians are confronted with a grim theocratic government that has regularly employed extreme violence against its own population since its foundation in 1979.

Faradena Afifi is a regular collaborator with Maggie Nicols and Steve Beresford, and has Afghan heritage. She plucks a small 18th century viola while improvising in a high, light voice. Birds sing from her phone. Her melismatic vocals evolve into a folksy melody in English. It's a warm, welcoming way to open the evening and bind the packed audience together.

Khabat Abas is reluctantly introduced as an international star, moving between The Iraq National Symphony and The London Improvisers Orchestra. Her cello is dressed in

a net of bling, and she adds the sound of this net to her repertoire of noise. The instrument is powerfully amplified, creating an odd but impressive effect of small, introverted sounds being magnified up to large scale.

Fari Bradley's set of songs has a calm, religious feel of modern psalms built from poems. She begins on piano with a song she learned while studying Sanskrit in the Indian Himalayas in the 1990s. The accompanying visuals were created by Iranian protesters and uploaded to the internet. The mandalas and kaleidoscopes are highly appropriate to Bradley's meditative music, and there's a stunning moment when she dons a pair of rainbow wings and seems to take flight across a monochrome image of Tehran. She's accompanied by the eloquent tenor sax of Omid Amir Larijani.

Roshi Nasehi also present songs from the piano. Her rich, warm voice allies to an assured presence as she chats about visiting Iran when she was 14, and (today) cutting off her hair to place in a cone, to be left outside the Iranian embassy. That cone is currently rattling away inside the piano. She brings Abas and her cello back on stage for a song about opium: "Everyone in Iran has an uncle who smokes too much."

Illuminated images of people suspended around the room are curated by the UK based Iranian artist Anahita Rezvani-Rad. This is the *Say Their Names* project, honouring people killed in Iran since September 2022. These photos, paintings and drawings, all contributed by Iranians, were also displayed outside London's Tate Modern last December.

Finally, a compelling set from soprano Alya Al-Sultani, who astonishingly combines operatic composition with a producer's role at the grime label South London Space Agency. Al-Sultani quietly reads a short poem and layers vocal lines on top with melodic and emotional clarity. Panting breath sounds and eventually Abas's cello are added to the mix. Al-Sultani's charisma ensures the room is at its most focused during her time on stage: "They said you are a savage and dangerous woman. I am speaking the truth and the truth is savage and dangerous."

Clive Bell

Big Joanie + R AGGS + Ghum
Mono, Glasgow, UK

"Get ready! For a Black girl revolution!" The three members of Big Joanie – guitarist Stephanie Phillips, drummer Chardine Taylor-Stone and bassist Estella Adeyeri – lined up on Mono's stage are an assured, united presence. Tonight is a big contrast to their last Glasgow show in 2019, at the 100 or so capacity Hug And Pint. Back then, their DIY origins were much more apparent, in both their surroundings and their relatively stripped back set-up. Since then, they've signed to Kill Rock Stars, and tonight they're supporting last year's second album *Back Home* in front of a sold out crowd – their third on this tour – with a slicker, more expansive sound in tow.

This change is apparent from early on in the set, when they push out the sound of single "Happier Still" to meet its anthemic potential, akin to their spiritual sisters Sleater-Kinney. Other songs utilise efficient switching of instruments among the core trio and additional touring member, multi-instrumentalist Vanessa Govinden. "Sainted" hinges on an electronic new wave beat, and "Confident Man" incorporates drum pads and a percussive shaker to create a more low key, whispering sound, echoing its themes of con men, scams and tricks. Organ sounds and vocal harmonies add depth to the scrappy "It's You" from debut album *Sistahs*. With her resonant singing voice, primary vocalist Phillips often sounds like a one-woman choir, and when the other members join her, it's dazzling.

Although London based, Glasgow is something of a second home for Big Joanie. Taylor-Stone gives onstage credit to early influences The Vaselines and The Pastels (whose frontman Stephen co-runs Mono's excellent instore record shop Monorail), and plays her drums standing up, like Bobby Gillespie in The Jesus & Mary Chain. Adeyeri also claims to have stolen a guitar line from "Glasgow's finest" Ray Aggs, the Sacred Paws and Trash Kit frontperson who supports tonight in the guise of their solo project R AGGS. An energetic and charming performer, Aggs's solo material has the electronic emo warmth of The Postal Service, incorporating synths and violin as well as their trademark conversational guitar parts. Further support comes from gothy London quartet Ghum, who also match strong stage presence with tight melodies.

Unsurprisingly for a group who centre Black feminism, the show is overtly political in places. Also a trade unionist and activist, Taylor-Stone at one point calls for a general strike to unanimous audience cheers. But it's not po-faced – after an impassioned speech about protecting the most vulnerable in leftist spaces, Taylor-Stone laughs, "but this is a song about witches". The friendship and connection between all four people on stage is palpable, and it feels only natural to get swept up in the righteous fun.

Towards the end of the set comes a grunge version of Solange Knowles's "Cranes In The Sky", teasing out the underlying angst in the original version. I can't help but think of Phillips's book *Why Solange Matters*, and specifically her credit to the kaleidoscopic artist for helping her access her "weird Black girl self" in her music. In a chant during the encore of recent single "In My Arms", Big Joanie acknowledge their origins as a Black feminist punk band. Their set tonight proves that they have grown to musically encompass so much more than that – while still holding firm to their DIY roots.

Claire Biddles

NikNak
Kings Place, London, UK

Themes of metamorphosis abound in NikNak's immersive performance. The concert begins with a meditation that resets the mood of the room. Many in the audience feel inclined to sit or lie on the floor. Piano loops and birdsong are embellished by a winter treescape projection, while a female voice, lifted from YouTube, encourages us to *"find compassion for the self"*. Before long, the guiding voice distorts and discordant sounds enter the fray. Calm is replaced by trepidation. Down the rabbit hole we go.

Nicole Raymond aka NikNak is a turntablist and Oram Awards winner who activates her instrument through storytelling. Tonight she performs her 2022 album *Sankofa* in full. It's a conceptual ambient record. While the title references the Akan word for retrieval, the album itself is inspired by comic book narratives and evokes the story of a Black woman (Storm) discovering her superpowers. *Sankofa* also symbolises the quest for knowledge through critical examination and the album's track titles echo this theme by hinting at the protagonist's character development.

The sounds themselves largely consist of a varied library of field recordings and found sounds. These are often collected by Raymond on journeys, and the way she treats the source material during the performance mirrors its transient origins. Using a Serato set-up allows Raymond to mix her digital library without

Big Joanie

Marilena Vlachopoulou

compromising the tactile advantages of vinyl. Samples are looped or scratched and sent through a series of delays, filter sweeps and reverbs, while synthetic chord sequences construct unstable fortifications around them. The venue's complex speaker arrangement means that certain frequencies pan around the room, disorientating the ear. Every now and then a deep bass drop arrests the air and reminds our bodies of their physical limitations.

The projections, which are edited in real time by the Bristol based artist Loëpa, not only provide a focal point but also illustrate what we hear: polygonal kaleidoscopic patterns, melting organisms, light tunnels and Rorschach-like distortions. The colours shift from warm sunburst hues to dark subaquatic greens and back again. I am reminded of Boards Of Canada's *Geogaddi* album artwork as well as the light vortex scene from *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Loëpa later explains that they are indeed influenced by 1960s and 70s psychedelia, manipulating footage to "create the comic world, but have it be sensory and about the living things around us".

The voices of the Afrofuturist authors Octavia Butler and Toni Morrison also appear in the set. They discuss how popular science feeds the joy of speculating, and how writing fantasy counters the boredom of everyday life. Much like her podcast series *The Narrative*, Raymond wants to increase exposure of content made by Black women and trans and non-binary creatives, and this is why Butler and Morrison are present. However, the way Raymond alters their speech on the decks, from intelligible to incomprehensible, makes me wonder if their inclusion is meant to highlight censorship or the silencing of Black authorship. "I love how you picked all of that up," she tells me after the show. "It's mainly just the texture. It's very improvised a lot of the time. Sometimes I haven't listened back to [the recording] at all and I'm just there, in the performance space, with these sounds responding to them live. The next time I perform it will be different. That's the beauty of it."

Ilia Rogatchevski

David Murray Quartet
Village Vanguard, New York, US

Heading down the stairs in the Vanguard to witness the first gig of the new band of one of the great contemporary tenor saxophonists, it's easy to cloud the mind with histories, both personal ones and those of the deeper legacy of modern jazz. For near three decades in the late 20th century, Murray was arguably the leader of modern jazz, playing regularly down the street at the long defunct Sweet Basil. And before Murray's rise, Dexter Gordon made his return from Europe in this same club. Murray tonight is also back from a long European sojourn; he's made occasional visits but this one looks like a real, permanent return.

That's the feeling tonight as he introduces his new quartet, the elder re-presenting himself and bringing the younger generation into his fold of ever unfolding modernism via pianist Marta Sánchez, bassist Luke Stewart and drummer Kassa Overall. Murray himself is still Murray, outside most of the 21st century shifts in jazz, like the move away from swing and toward complex metres and rhythms built off the legacy of EDM; and, after many tenuous fits and starts, a deepening connection to hiphop. Overall he has been one of the leaders of the latter, making music that embraces not just the rhythms but the lyrical and social purpose of hiphop, while sparing nothing in terms of idiomatic improvisation. Murray has always been a futurist-traditionalist in the classic sense that goes back to Ellington, taking progressive steps inside the idiom, a mix of Ben Webster and Albert Ayler, pressing the possibilities of jazz by following the roots – as Ayler did – as deep as they go until he bursts in bloom on another acre.

Tonight, his tone is huge. He's as strong as ever on the downbeats and as raucous on mid and uptempo numbers, and as plain-spoken and romantic as always on ballads. He plays bass clarinet on the penultimate number, the sound huge and syrupy. All the pieces are original, serviceable but indistinct.

The fascination is in how these young players fit in. In this context Sánchez is the most straight-ahead player, even hinting at "Everything Happens To Me" in one solo. After Murray, she gets the most opportunities and, after she burns off some nervous energy in her solo on the opening "Nectar", scattering ideas without much follow through, she settles down into a strong foil, playing within form and structure while Murray is liable to move to freedom at any moment.

Stewart and Overall are excellent in this context, and it's a kind of revelation to hear this side of their playing. Stewart, through James Brandon Lewis's groups, Irreversible Entanglements, Blacks' Myths and his own projects, among others, seems to have done everything but play in the modern straight-ahead tradition. Tonight, he is both swinging and grounded, terrific inside the changes and inside the time. He seems to be having a great time, smiling and walking and soloing with a sense of fun and wit. Murray introduces Overall by saying, "I finally found a good drummer." It's all there: swing, slow and fast triple metre, rhumba. One thinks back to the Gordon quartet of 1977 with Eddie Gladden on the drums, shaping forms and phrases, boosting the leader and everyone else.

George Grella

Terraforma x La Bourse de Commerce
La Bourse de Commerce, Paris, France

After cycling through the aftermath of the biggest protest of the year in Paris (against pension reform), I get to the 18th century former grain exchange building La Bourse du Commerce, right in the city centre. It's below freezing outside and I'm being given the choice by the gallery's doorman to either enter their high end restaurant or queue for one of Milanese festival Terraforma's itinerant series of events.

Named after architect and designer Ettore Sottsass's 1972 series of dystopian drawings and writings condemning mass consumption, the programmes are a conduit for Terraforma's ecological, regenerative and design-led values through gigs hosted in different European cities. In the basement auditorium, festival founder Ruggero Pietromarchi presents its ethos, supported by archival slides and photos. He is followed by a performative lecture on hedonism in festival and club culture by the evening's programmer Erica Petrillo. It feels like being given the instruction on how to enjoy the performances to come.

There's no single way to appreciate Éliane Radigue's compositions, and tonight's first performance is a testament to their infinite allure. "The idea of the ocean has a lot to offer to us," comments Radigue on the title of her body of work *Occam Ocean* in a 2022 YouTube interview featured in *The Making Of Occam XXV*, following her collaboration with organist Frédéric Blondy. The last *Occam* iteration *Occam XXVI* saw the continuous sound composer work with Italian percussionist Enrico Malatesta in 2018, with a new water image as a source of inspiration and guidance.

Armed with two cymbals, two bows and a bendir in a purely acoustic set-up, Malatesta performs Radigue's piece to the packed auditorium. As he bows one cymbal, a drone materialises and is coloured by the adjacent cymbal's resonance. The loosening and tightening of the screw reveal metallic screeches at times and brass and horn-like sounds at others. The bendir amplifies the resonances when being held above the cymbals but when in contact, generates astonishing magnetic tape and feedback-like sounds, conjuring Radigue's early career feedback works. The meditation is brought to its apex by both interlocked undulating bowed cymbals, as people close their eyes to appreciate the boundless layers of the piece.

We move from minimalist acoustic territories to a maximalist performance as Chuquimamani-Condori (Elysia Crampton Chuquima) and her brother Joshua Chuquimia Crampton take over the basement foyer, with many more audience members flooding in for a sold out evening. Chuquimamani-Condori triggers South American radio sweepers, cumbia beats on the decks and performs repetitive tarqueadas on her synth, as her brother plays dream pop riffs on the guitar. First row die-hard fans are determined to capture the entire gig on their phones as the duo slowly fill the sonic gaps with saturated pentatonic melodies. Layered drones, creating dark modes, offer a sombre and sorrowful yet relieving world, bringing more nuance to the performance.

Goat screams, silence, vinyl crackles, louder human screams... DJ Marcelle throws an industrial record on top, doubles the tempo from the Crampton siblings, brightening the mood with a Berber percussion track. The front row phone filmers are now replaced with dancers as Marcelle plays a drum 'n' bass record. But she's not about preserving the status quo, and Rhyw's super fast deconstructed techno track "Honey Badger" suddenly discombobulates the dancers. Marcelle earns cheers again with Italian producer DJ Khalab's "Aeh" followed by Sisso's rapturous 180 bpm Singeli track "Biti No 1".

Gustave Evrard

On Site

Exhibitions, installations, etc

Roscoe Mitchell
Keeper Of The Code: Paintings 1963–2022
Corbett Vs Dempsey, Chicago, US

In 2020, the year he turned 80, Roscoe Mitchell was awarded a Jazz Master fellowship by the Natural Endowment for the Arts. But it's fair to say that from the outset, his creative objectives have transcended musical genres. The name of his first album *Sound*, which was recorded in 1966, suggested that music itself was only part of his material. And the next year, Mitchell's first widely seen painting adorned the sleeve of Lester Bowie's *Numbers 1&2* LP.

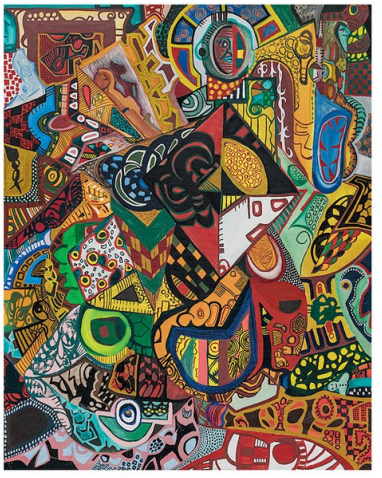
These were not the acts of an artist who would be satisfied with simply playing jazz. But even though he made his first paintings in the 1960s, including one that appeared on the sleeve of The Art Ensemble Of Chicago's *The Third Decade*, they haven't received attention commensurate with his music. Keeper Of The Code: Paintings 1963–2022 is the first solo exhibition of Mitchell's visual work.

The first thing to notice upon walking into Corbett Vs Dempsey's main gallery space is *The Cage*, an enclosure of bells, drums, squeeze toys and other little instruments that Mitchell has been playing alongside his diverse woodwinds since the 1960s. Imposing, whimsical and practically laid out, it's both an instrumentarium and an installation, and its presence here makes a case that Mitchell has been using visual materials to shape space all along. It's also a way for the exhibit to acknowledge the primacy of Mitchell's musical work. One smaller room is devoted to paintings from the 60s, including the aforementioned album covers. A video programme in a small screening vault shows five films of him playing in concert and at home. And Mitchell's Space Ensemble played at the show's opening. The sight of him judiciously striking bells and splitting sopranino saxophone tones, accenting the group's music with perfectly placed gestures, suggested images of how he might apply acrylic to canvas.

The main gallery is densely hung with canvases containing riotously hued human and animal visages. This registers as ironic, given that Mitchell performed in work clothes when the rest of The Art Ensemble Of Chicago donned costumes or painted their faces. Nearly half of the exhibit's 81 pieces date from 2022, when Mitchell, kept off the road by the pandemic, spent the bulk of his time painting. One work, *COVID-19 Alert*, depicts humans and cats frolicking around a woman brandishing a nasal swab, perhaps acknowledging that while Mitchell worked, others were living it up. But it's not as though he wasn't having any fun. Paintings like *When A Pot Belly Stove Becomes A Tap Dancer* and *Angry Chicken* evidence a playfulness that has faded from Mitchell's music in this century.

Many of the paintings are portraits featuring faces, and faces within faces. Their African features are rendered using bright dots similar to those used by Australian Aboriginal artists. More action-oriented paintings like *Welcome To The Neighborhood* and *DJ's Moving And Hauling* might be drawn from memory, but the six-piece sequence dubbed *AACM Series* abstracts humans and buildings into a maz e of colours and geometrical shapes. Other pieces dispense with human forms altogether, orchestrating mesmerizing expanses from a smaller dots and squares. The volume and variety of the recent paintings conveys the impression that, at age 82, Roscoe Mitchell isn't simply ensuring that a lesser known aspect of his work gets some recognition; he's revved up by the chance to do new work.

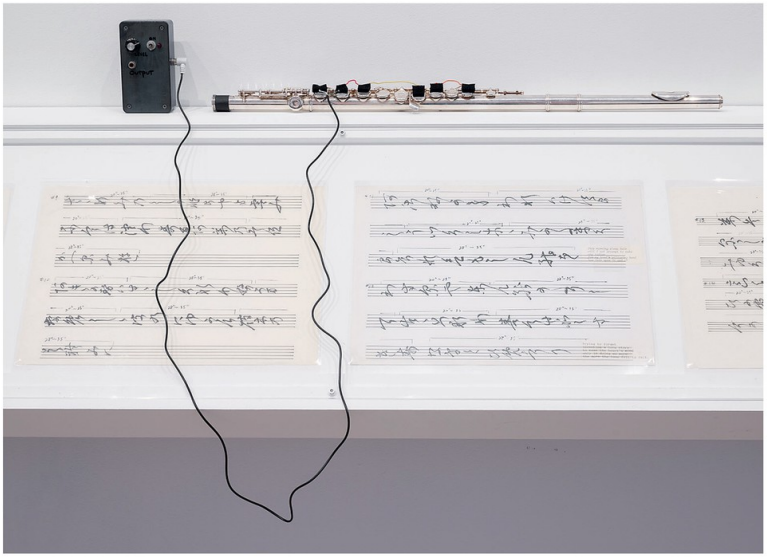
Bill Meyer



Roscoe Mitchell, *Panoply* **(1967)**

Roscoe Mitchell, *The Time Keepers II* **(2021)**

Courtesy Roscoe Mitchell/Corbett Vs Dempsey



Installation views from Yasunao Tone's Region Of Paramedia (2023)

Yasunao Tone
Region Of Paramedia
Artists Space, New York, US

Yasunao Tone is perhaps most associated with the CD (and, later, MP3) experiments he has undertaken since the mid-1980s. In such experiments, Tone augments digital media with physical materials, like tape, or with code to introduce errors into an otherwise pristine playback system. "Machines are designed not to make mistakes," he has said, but, "[in] our behaviour we often make mistakes".

His statement suggests an interest in destabilising distinctions between man and machine, an interest which conditions, too, the epithet he applies to the CDs. They are not "broken", in Tone's parlance, but "wounded", an adjective reserved for living things. Several wounded CDs are on display in his first retrospective exhibition Regions Of Paramedia, at Artists Space, New York. Flecks of tape radiate across their shining surfaces, the material's diaphanous appearance belying the aural severity of its effect: as the tape blocks both normal audio transmission and the devices' error-correction software, it generates unreproducible bursts of noise. This capability for artistic production to be, in Tone's words, "simultaneously multipliable and nonrepetitive", is the crux of his "paramedia". The term derives, in part, from another organic metaphor: parasite.

Tone adapted the metaphor from Michel Serres, whose theory of the parasite posits its multiple French definitions (as biological agent and, literally, static) as interdependent. Yet, if Tone articulated his concept in the 80s, after Serres had been translated to English – and after the invention of the CD – Region Of Paramedia demonstrates it as a basic principle of his oeuvre going back to the early 60s, when he entered Tokyo's vibrant avant garde. In a scene that privileged both structured and spontaneous performance, via what Reiko Tomii has called "collaborative collectivism", Tone formed the improvisation unit Group Ongaku (Music Group), participated in actions by Hi-Red Center, and frequented the nightclub Killer Joe's.

Region Of Paramedia provides documentation of these activities in the form of posters, scores, documents and video clips, including of a televised performance with Toshi Ichiyanagi. There, as elsewhere, Tone employed everyday objects to interrupt expected musical development. But, like Serres, he manifests immaterial "parasites" as well, namely through language. For his score to Kenji Kanesaka's film *Hopscotch* (1967), also on view, Tone prodded collaborators to react to the multivalent word hiku and correlated their varied responses to colours and, then, sounds.

While the exhibition insists on the importance of Tokyo to Tone's artistic incubation, it dedicates more floor space to his work since moving to New York in 1973. There is a scatter of sounds, videos and archival materials documenting performances with an array of collaborators, including Merce Cunningham, Senga Nengudi and Barbara Held. His compositions for the latter rely, like *Hopscotch*, upon complex processes of translation – in one case, of eighth century Japanese poetry – into musical notes. *Lyrictron* (1989), one of several custom instruments on display, performs a flute to haiku conversion, while Tone's first album *Musica Iconologos* (1993) culled its indeterminate audio from Chinese characters rendered as digital images.

In a corresponding text, Tone explains that "music resides not only in layers of sounds and scores but also in images, text and that uncanny place where the four intersect". If the art he and his peers developed in the early 60s endeared them to practitioners like Dick Higgins – whose concept of intermedia lent its name to a 1969 festival organised by Tone, Takehisa Kosugi and Mieko Shiomi – Region Of Paramedia signals a slight, but key, difference. For Higgins, intermedia occupies the "uncharted land" between media. Paramedia feeds instead on collapse, on a fraught, indeed uncanny, situation in which people cultivate shifting plays of identification with things, languages, sounds.

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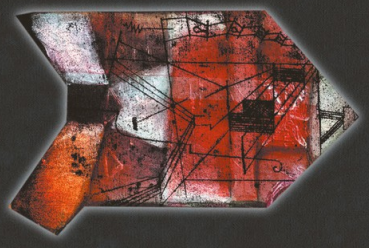

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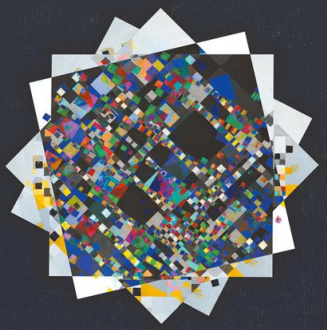

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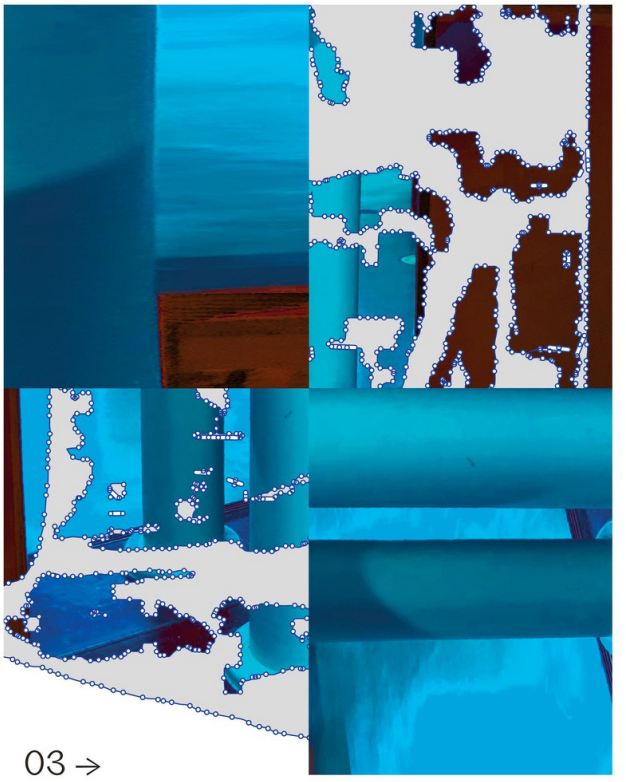

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HET BOS ANTWERP
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Aya Suzuki
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Charmaine's Names
Chillera
Daphne X
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Justice Yeldham
Morthen Kiang
Nuit Noire
Silvia Tarozzi &
Deborah Walker
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Valentina Goncharova
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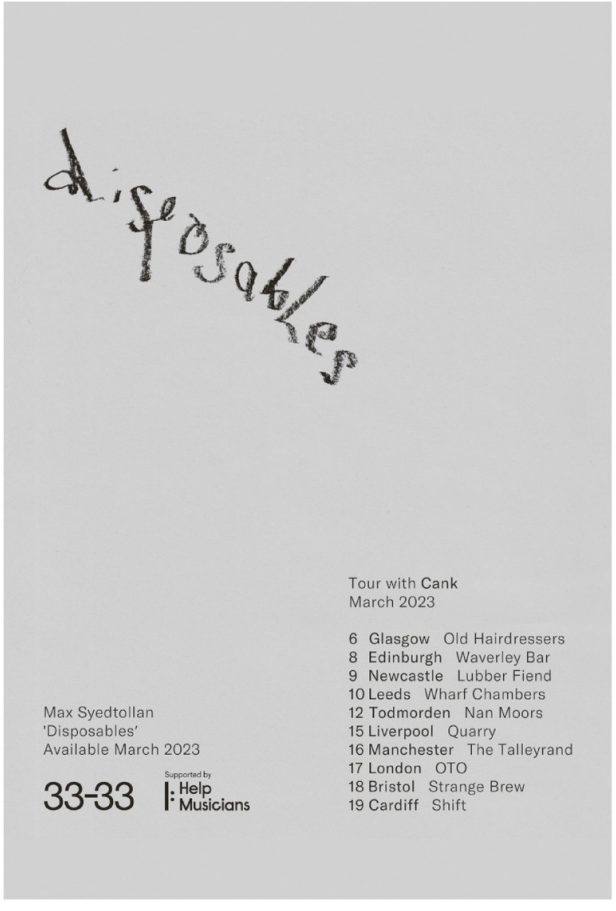
Disposables
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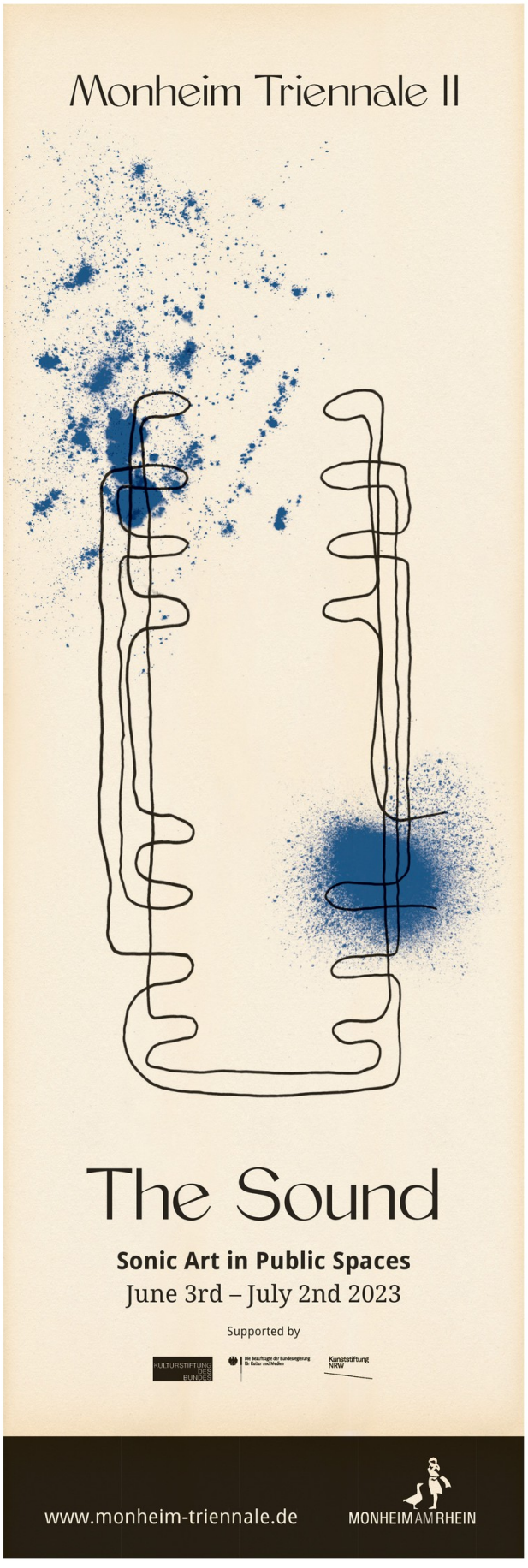
16 Manchester The Talleyrand
17 London OTO
18 Bristol Strange Brew
19 Cardiff Shift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fönstret is the new publishing division of stockholm's edition festival for other music focused on presenting new work by local artists and surfacing material from the festival's archives.

fönstret #3
people & places
188 page book

bilingual book of essays about people or places of special meaning to 29 artists connected to stockholm's various communities for other music

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finn loxbo guitar
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Ongoing sonic response to
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Voice of Hearing
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Original text by
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A SOUND THAT NEVER WAS

||: Bmoore/Vol.2

70 Jahre Schallplatten und Soundarbeiten von Künstler*innen
70 Years of Records and Sound Works by Artists

17. Dezember 2022
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>>>>>>> May 14, 2023

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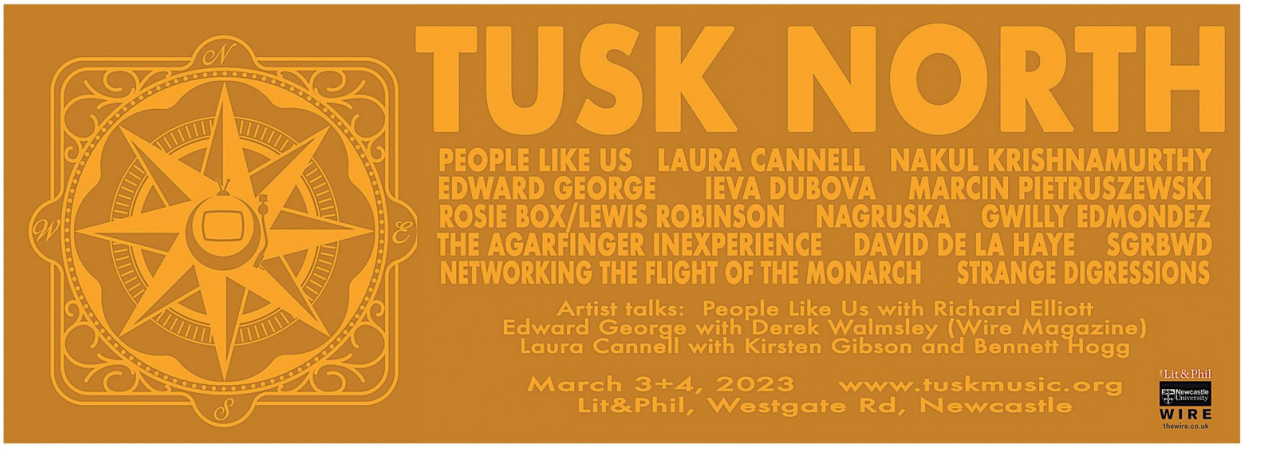

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Out There

UK festivals

Brilliant Corners
Belfast jazz festival with concerts by Sarathy Korwar, Run Logan Run, Lara Jones, Binker Golding, Alexander Hawkins Trio and more. Belfast various venues, 2–11 March, £45/festival pass and various prices per concert, brilliantcornersbelfast.com

Eavesdropping
Four day festival and two day forum with eight performers presenting their latest or in-progress works including Silvia Tarozzi , Christine Abdelnour, Lucy Railton and NikNak. The talk and discussion programme features guest speakers on the theme of Experiments In Defiance. London Cafe Oto, 30 March–2 April, £TBA, eavesdropping.london

International festivals

Borealis Norway
20th anniversary edition with music and sound experiments from Dewa Alit & Gamelan Salukat and Maryanne Amacher; indigenous voices including Laura Ortman and Elina Waage Mikalsen; new music from local composers including Maja Ratkje and Mira Thiruchelvam; a sound installation by Maia Urstad; new commissions by Lo Kristenson and Jo David Meyer Lysne, plus Beat Furrer, Ensemble Contrechamps and more. Bergen various venues, 15–19 March, borealisfestival.no

Edition Sweden
Stockholm experimental music annual ranging from new music for gamelan to four-handed works for organ. With Dewa Alit & Gamelan Ensemble, Catherine Christer Hennix's Kamigaku Ensemble, Kali Malone, Uday Bhawalkar, Kristofer Svensson and Ellen Arkbro. Stockholm various venues, 16–19 March, 900 SEK–300 SEK, sixth.edition-festival.com

Elevate Austria
Art, music and discourse festival. The music programme includes Caterina Barbieri, Afrorack, Pharmakon, Mun Sing, Panda Bear & Sonic Boom, Planetary Assault Systems, WaqWaq Kingdom, Catu Diosis, Alex Zhang Hungtai, PLF and Aïsha Devi. The talks conclude with Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek's *Only A Catastrophe Can Save Us*. Graz various venues, 1–5 March, dev2.elevate.at

Kraak Belgium
One day festival dedicated to "sound makers and breakers from the underbush of the experimental at large" organised by Belgium's eclectic Kraak label. Including Justice Yeldham, Silvia Tarozzi & Deborah Walker, Valentina Goncharova, Alto Fuero, Bâton XXL, Daphne X, Younes Zarhoni, and others. Antwerp Het Bos, 4 March, €36–€21, kraak.net

Tremor Portugal
Azorean multi-arts event with Angel Bat Dawid, Avalanche Kaito, Divide And Dissolve, Grove, Marina Herlop, Ill Considered, Ella Minus and HHY & The Kampala Unit. Azores São Miguel Island, 28 March–1 April, tremor-pdl.com

MaerzMusik Germany
Festival dedicated to artists and ensembles whose work goes beyond disciplines with work by George Lewis, Matana Roberts, Elaine Mitchener, Jacob Kirkegaard, Hanna Hartman, Else Marie Pade, Jakob Ullman, Jason Yarde, Alex Paxton, Riot Ensemble, Mark Knoop, Juliet Fraser and Tansy Davies. Berlin various venues, times and prices, 17–26 March, berlinerfestspiele.de

Wire supported events

Big Ears US
200 performances over four days including Sun Ra Arkestra, John Zorn's 70th birthday projects, Grouper, Arooj Aftab, Bill Frisell, Tyshawn Sorey, 700 Bliss, Carl Stone, Caterina Barbieri, Makaya McCraven, Mary Halvorson, Éliane Radigue, Annea Lockwood, Catherine Lamb, Steve Reich, Terry Allen, Bill Orcutt Guitar Quartet, James 'Blood' Ulmer, William Parker, King Britt, Steve Gunn, Lonnie Holley, Kali Malone and Marc Ribot Y Los Cubanos Postizos. TN Knoxville various venues, 30 March–2 April, $850–$125, bigearsfestival.org

Cafe Oto UK
Events at North East London's venue for experimental music include: Éliane Radigue by Malatesta and Lash (1 March), Edward George's *The Strangeness Of Jazz* (2), WaqWaq Kingdom (3), Me Lost Me + Bulbils (5), Hannan Jones/Pat Thomas/Shamica Ruddock (8), Alex Zhang Hungtai (11), *Free To Air: Improvised And Experimental Music On British TV, 1973–1983* (12, 3pm, 7:30pm), Katie Kim (15), Object Collection *House Concert* (16–17), El Khat (19), Tony Buck At 60 with Lee Ranaldo, John Butcher, Magda Mayas & Andy Moor (21–23), The End with Mats Gustafsson and Sofia Jernberg (24–25). London Cafe Oto, various times & prices, cafeoto.co.uk

Iklectik UK
Events at the South London performance space include: Kate Carr + Liz Helman + Lucie Stepankova + David Toop (1 March) and Club Integral with Anthony Moore (10). London Iklectik, various times and prices, iklectikartlab.com

Sátántangó Germany
Béla Tarr's seven hour magnum opus with a live score newly written by nine different composers. Digitally remastered print shown without breaks underneath a crematorium. Berlin Silent Green, 31 March–1 April, digitalinberlin.de

Sonic Protest France
18 evenings of music in and around Paris, plus a streaming radio station. With Eugene Chadbourne, Christine Abdelnour, Russell Haswell & Hugo Esquinca, El Khat, Avalanche Kaito, Angelicus, Marina Rosenfeld, Patrice Cailet & Alan Courtis, Anne-F Jacques & Ryoko Akama, Ecko Bazz & Still, and Asmus Tietchens. Paris various venues, 14 March–2 April, sonicprotest.com

Tusk North UK
Newcastle adventurous music festival with People Like Us, Laura Cannell, Nakul Krishnamurthy, Marcin Pietruszewski, Edward George's *Strangeness Of Dub*, Gwilly Edmondez and Ieva Dubova. Plus a host of local noiseniks, and artists discussions with *The Wire*'s Derek Walmsley, Edward George, Laura Cannell and People Like Us. Newcastle upon Tyne The Lit & Phil, 3–4 March, £25/weekend, £12/day, tuskmusic.org

Grouper

Garrett Grove

Variations France
Festival of adventurous music in upper Brittany with performances by Lucrecia Dalt, Will Guthrie & Ensemble Nist Nah, Abdullah Ibrahim, Carl Stone, Sélébéyone, DJ Marcelle, Silvia Tarozzi & Deborah Walker, Moin, Okkyung Lee, Puce Mary, Claire Rousay & Leya, Joe Rainey, Aho Ssan, Marina Herlop and more. Plus music by Éliane Radigue, Pauline Oliveros, Delia Derbyshire and others. Nantes Le Lieu Unique, 28 March–9 April, lelieuunique.com

Women From Space Canada
Fifth anniversary of Toronto's celebration of women working in a diverse range of musical traditions. Including peformances by Nicole Mitchell & Coco Elysses, Karen Ng, Seylon Stills and more to be announded. Toronto Music Gallery, 8–11 March, $50–$30/festival pass, $15/night, womenfromspace.com

Special events

Studio STUK Belgium
Relocated temporarily to Studio Manhattan, Leuven's dance centre programme's music events include: Hanne de Backer & Gabbro's *As We Walk* film & concert (12 March), Zonzo Compagnie's *Hey Meredith! – The World Of Meredith Monk* (29), Steve Gunn (18 April) and Kaitlyn Aurelia Smith (25). Leuven Manhattan, 12 March–25 April, various times & prices, stuk.be

Online & hybrid events

A Sound That Never Was Online
Online version of an installation in which 14 sound artists respond to Vivian Darrcoh-Lozowski's text *Voice Of Hearing* (Squint Press) with the playback influenced by data from a weather station and a seismic sensor. Artists include Félicia Atkinson, Raven Chacon, crys cole, David Grubbs and Christof Migone. Online, from 16 February, asoundthatneverwas.net

Mopomoso TV Online
Streaming premieres of compilations of audiovisual works by improvisors and collaborating film makers and visual artists. Third Sunday of every third month. YouTube, 19 March, free, youtube.com

Roulette US/Online
In-person concerts at New York's long-running experimental music space, many of which are also livestreamed: Kato Hideki (5 March), Joanna Mattrey and friends (10), Nibal Malshi's *Women In The Golden Age Of Arab Music* (11), Davey Williams Memorial Concert (13), Peter Evans's Being & Becoming (16), Lucie Vítková (21), Andrew Yee (23), Nyokabi Kariũki (24), John Zorn's New Masada Quartet (26), Bill Orcutt Guitar Quartet (27). Online & New York Roulette, various times and prices, roulette.org

Exhibitions & installations

Apparition Room Canada
A group exhibition curated by Lee Plested bringing together digitised artworks from the Western Front's archives inside an installation. Performance documentation, video and sound works by over 50 artists including Kathy Acker, Joan La Barbara, Hank Bull, Alison Knowles and Hildegard Westerkamp. Vancouver Western Front, until 1 April, free, westernfront.ca

Broken Music Vol Two: 70 Years Of Records And Sound Works By Artists Germany
Follow-up to Ursula Block's *Broken Music: Artists' Recordworks* exhibition which focused on artists' approaches to the record as an object. With Carsten Nicolai, Laurie Anderson, Fatima Al Qadiri, Saâdane Afif, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Harry Bertoia, Milan Knížák, Robert Lippok, Christian Marclay, Susan Philipsz and many more. Berlin Hamburger Bahnhof, until 14 May, €14–€7, smb.museum

Sonic Palette: Sabiwa & Guillaume Dujat UK
Solo exhibitions by Berlin based sound artist Sabiwa and Manchester based surround sound AV producer Dujat. Opening and closing concerts at Dai Hall feature Sabiwa, Mariam Rezael and Petronn Sphene (24 March) and Farida Amadou, Guy Sherwin & Lynn Loo and Guillaume Dujat (8 April). Huddersfield Dai Hall & Bath House Galleries, 24 March–8 April, amespace.uk

Gina Southgate: From Live Music UK
Exhibition of quick-fire paintings made during performances of improvising and jazz musicians over the course of several decades. London Riverside Studios, until 10 March, free, riversidestudios.co.uk

UK on stage

Alison Cotton
Songs with viola and harmonium drones from Cotton's recent *The Portrait You Painted Of Me* album (Rocket Recordings/Feeding Tube). The Sunderland concert is the premiere of a new project about two opera fans who saved 29 Jews from Nazi Germany: Sunderland Seventeen Nineteen (11 March), Birkenhead Future Yard (13 April), Newcastle upon Tyne The Lubber Fiend (14) and Sheffield Bishop's House (15). twitter.com

aya x MFO
Manchester experimental producer, DJ and vocalist Aya Sinclair teams up with visual artist Marcel Weber for this sit down event. London Purcell Room, 19 March, 8pm, £15, southbankcentre.co.uk

Gina Birch
Solo tour for The Raincoats founder who released her new album *I Play My Bass Loud* in February: Brighton The Hope And Ruin (21 March), London Oslo (22), Glasgow Hug And Pint (24), Dublin Whelan's (25) and Leeds Brudenell Social Club (27). ginabirch.bandcamp.com

The Comet Is Coming
Psychedelic jazz trio featuring saxophonist Shabaka Hutchings: Birmingham O2 Institute (28 February), Newcastle Upon Tyne Boiler Shop (1 March), Aberdeen Lemon Tree (2), Glasgow St Luke's (3), Liverpool Invisible Wind Factory (4), Norwich The Waterfront (7), Cambridge Junction (8), Nottingham Rock City (9), Leeds Stylus (10), Bristol SWX (11), Southampton Engine Rooms (14), Brighton Chalk (15), London Koko (16 & 17) and Dublin Button Factory (18). thecometiscoming.co.uk

Nwando Ebizie: Inside Beethoven
Afrofuturist singer, composer, and ritual designer Ebizie and The Aurora Orchestra present a performance of Beethoven's *Symphony No 5* from memory and a new work combining orchestral and electronic elements on the theme of fate. London Printworks, 23 March, 6pm & 9pm, £29.50, southbankcentre.co.uk

El Khat
Avant grooves on homemade and traditional instruments from the Yemeni artist now based in Tel Aviv. We described his group's 2022 album *Albat Alawi Op99* on Glitterbeat as addictive: Manchester Soup (16 March), Newcastle upon Tyne Cobalt Studios (17), Birkenhead Future Yard (18), London Cafe Oto (19), Bristol The Crofters Rights (20). swampbooking.com

Jad Fair
Jad Fair and his avant rock crew. London Moth Club, 25 March, 7:30pm, £23, dice.fm

The Greenhouse Effect
Music created in response to nature in the Barbican's plant-packed conservatory. Works by Claudia Molitor, Matthew Bourne, Carola Bauckholt and more. London Barbican Conservatory, 12 March, 4pm & 7:30pm, £20, barbican.org.uk

Heinous Whining
Leeds no-audience noisenik Territorial Gobbing presents performances by Tasos Stamou, No Lagos Musique, Yol and Katherine Armstrong. Leeds Wharf Chambers, 2 March, 7:30pm, £6–£3, wharfchambers.org

Soweto Kinch & LSO: White Juju
Saxophonist, composer and rapper Kinch responds to Black British history and the lockdown era in a collaboration with London Symphony Orchestra involving sound and light installations. London Printworks, 16 March, 7pm, £32.45, printworkslondon.co.uk

Cassie Kinoshi
Performance by the saxophonist, composer, arranger and member of Seed Ensemble and Kokoroko. London Purcell Room, 5 March, 8pm, £15, southbankcentre.co.uk

Sarathy Korwar
Indian raised, London based drummer, composer and bandleader whose latest album *Kalak* the Leaf Label describes as an Indo-futurist manifesto: London The Roundhouse (10 March), York The Crescent (13 April) and London Village Underground (16). sarathykorwar.com

Loudspeaker Orchestra
Monthly concerts of music for multiple loudspeakers: *Climate Words* – spoken word-derived works based on interviews and aural histories connected to climate issues. London Blackheath Halls, 17 March, 7pm, £5/booking, loudspeakerorchestra.org

Manchester Collective: Black Angels
String quartet with live

electronics perform a new commission from Moor Mother alongside George Crumb's *Black Angels* and other works: Salford The White Hotel (16 March), Birkenhead Future Yard (17), Leeds Howard Assembly Room (18), Bristol Strange Brew, (22), Nottingham Lakeside Arts Centre (23) and London Kings Place (24), manchestercollective.co.uk

Matters + Prncss + Arch Femmesis
Supersonic presents an International Women's Day special with psychedelic dance duo Matters, experimental grime from Prncss, and DIY techno-pop from Arch Femmesis. Birmingham The Old Print Works, 4 March, 7pm–late, £10, supersonicfestival.com

Me Lost Me
Experimental singer, songwriter and storyteller based in Newcastle: Sheffield Abbeydale Picture House (2 March), Oxford The Library Pub (3), Tregaron Gwyl Ffynnon Garon (4), London Cafe Oto (5), Newcastle upon Tyne Bobiks (8 April), York The Crescent (20) and Hertford Corn Exchange (23). melostme.com

Mopomoso
Monthly improvised music matinee with Paulina Owczarek (saxophones), Witold Oleszak (prepared piano, objects), John Bissett (guitar) and more. London Vortex, 26 March, 2pm, £12–£8, vortexjazz.co.uk

No Age + Shake Chain
Stream of consciousness rock duo from Los Angeles sharing a bill with the London quartet whose *Snake Chain* album was one of *The Wire*'s avant rock highlights of 2022. London 100 Club, 4 March, 7:30pm, £14, upsettherhythm.co.uk

Lisa O'Neil
Irish singer and songwriter signed to Rough Trade tours new album *All Of This Is Chance*: Leeds Howard Assembly Room (16 March), York The Black Swan (17), Kendal Brewery Arts Centre (18), Liverpool Philharmonic Hall (19), Bristol St George's (21), Oxford SJE Arts Centre(22), London Barbican (23), Gateshead The Sage (25), Edinburgh Voodoo Rooms (26–27) and Manchester Band On The Wall (28). lisaoneill.ie

The Peer Hat
Mancunian bar/music venue hosts guitar and drums improvisation courtesy of David Birchall & Phillip Marks, ambient electronics from Ibukun Sunday, plus Kamran Syed Ali of Harappian Night Recordings. Manchester Peer Hat, 21 March, thepeerhat.com

Síbín
South East London collective present a new project led by Kwake Bass in a one-off performance with curated visuals. Featured artists include Natty Wylah, Goya Gumbani, MA.MOYO, Kofi Stone, Marysia Osu and Anja Ngozi. London Purcell Room, 26 March, 8pm, £12.50, southbankcentre.co.uk

Širom
Instrumental 'imaginary folk' trio from Slovenia signed to Glitterbeat: Halifax The Victoria Theatre (5 March), Glasgow The Old Hairdresser's (6), Salford The White Hotel (7), Bristol Strange Brew (8), Bishops Castle SpArc Theatre (9) and London Cafe Oto (10, sold out). sirom.bandcamp.com

Richard Skelton
Rare live appearance from landscape-focused sound artist Skelton. London St John On Bethnal Green, 31 March, 7pm, £20, dice.fm

Spaces Unfolding
Improvising trio of Neil Metcalfe on flute, Philipp Wachsmann on violin and electronics, and Emil Karlsen on drums and percussion: Bristol The Fringe (7 March), Oxford Tap Social (8), Cheltenham Smokey Joe's (9) and Manchester Unitarian Chapel (16). emilkarlsen.com

Coby Sey
Curl collective member, performer, producer and writer whose debut album *Conduit* ranked highly in our best of 2022 chart: Manchester Soup (8 March) and Bristol Strange Brew (10). cobysey.bandcamp.com

Max Syedtollan & Cank: Disposables
Experimental composer whose new album *Disposables* is released on 33-33 this month teams up with performance troupe Cank for improvisation, mutant song and movement: Glasgow The Old Hairdresser's (6 March), Edinburgh The Waverley (8), Newcastle upon Tyne The Lubber Fiend (9), Leeds Wharf Chambers (10), Todmorden Nan Moors (12), Liverpool The Quarry (15), Manchester The Talleyrand (16), London Cafe Oto (17), Bristol Strange Brew (18) and Cardiff Shift (19). maxsyedtollan.net

Devin Townsend
Canadian post-metal musician, composer and producer: Bexhill-On-Sea De La Warr Pavilion (28 March), Bristol O2 Academy (29), Manchester Academy (31 March), Nottingham Rock City, (1 April), Newcastle University Students Union (2), Wolverhampton KK's Steel Mill (4) and Norwich University Of East Anglia (4). hevydevy.com

Christina Vantzou
Realisation with live musicians of Vantzou's latest ambient-classical album *No 5*, which combines field recordings, acoustic and electronic instruments, and electronics. London Milton Court, 24 March, 7:30pm, £20–£5, barbican.org.uk

Incoming

BRDCST Belgium
Brussels' main venue plays host to 30 artists over three nights. The line up features Kode9's *Escapology*, Sarathy Korwar's *Kalak*, Slumberland & Sainkho Namtchylak, El Khat, Tim Hecker, DJ Marcelle, The Dwarfs Of East Agouza, Joe Rainey, Ill Considered, Gaye Su Akyol, Steve Gunn x David Moore, Steve Gunn x Zoh Amba, Tom Skinner, Elvin Brandhi, Yeah You and more. Brussels AB, 7–9 April, €50/weekend, €23–€22/night, abconcerts.be

Counterflows UK
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FIMAV Canada
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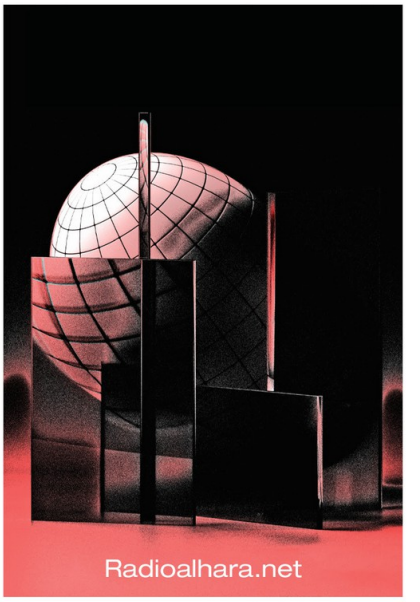

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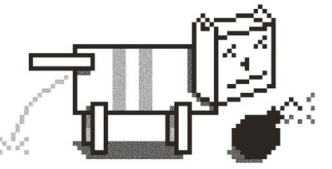

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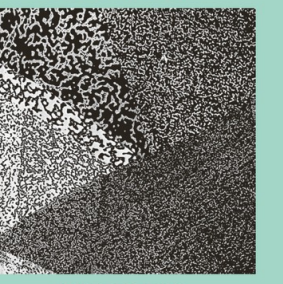

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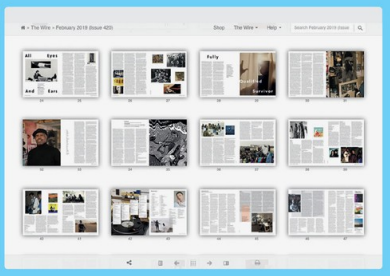

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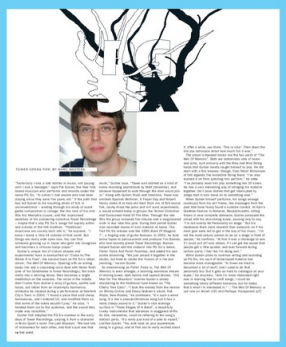

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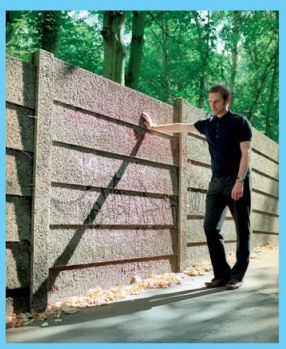

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The sound of a single piano key sends Pat Gubler aka PG Six on a journey into deep listening

The Gubler family piano

I'm six or seven years old, and we're over at my uncle's house. I'm sitting at his piano, a console-sized upright with walnut finish. I think the grown-ups must be elsewhere in the house or outside.

Picking out notes at the keyboard, I'm fascinated at the result when I press a certain key. It's a note in the middle-low register. The unison strings on this note were slightly out of tune, and I was hearing the sounds pleasantly beat against one another. I remember that its tone was a little different – the felt on the hammer must have been harder, so it was a little louder and the tone was a bit more brilliant than the adjacent notes. I played the same sequence of single notes over and over, and that colourful one seemed like the perfect one to land on.

Years later when we got a piano at home, the guy who tuned it was happy having someone hang out and watch him work. He would pause to explain a bit of what he was doing as he went along. I liked hearing the piano with the front panel off: it was louder, you could hear the percussion of the hammers, and there were all kinds of weird sounds and harmonics that were contained within the case. Hearing what the strings sounded like when they were muted with a felt strip, or a rubber wedge, or a spring-loaded plastic gadget called a Papp's mute, created timbres a little like those I heard later in John Cage's compositions for prepared piano.

And then there was listening to him set the temperament. He explained that equal temperament was a compromise to be able to play effectively across various different keys, and he would set it by playing a sequence of intervals and listening to the rate of the beat frequencies. The task had a practical outcome, which is that the piano would end up being *in tune*. But I also realised that there was a whole world of sounds in the process of getting there that seemed to me to be *music.*

Much later, when I was in college, I followed the music writing of Kyle Gann of *The Village Voice*. I recall a piece on Pauline Oliveros, and was particularly intrigued by the descriptions of her Deep Listening Band, and what this concept of deep listening might even be. An observation that stuck with me was her response to her music sometimes being lumped in the category of new age music: "My music is too thorny to be new age."

I went to check out a concert at the Pauline Oliveros Foundation in Kingston, New York. This particular event included reed player Joe McPhee and readings by sci-fi writer Rachel Pollack. I arrived about an hour early and poked my head in the space to see what time things were getting started, and there was a guy wearing a Led Zeppelin T-shirt setting up some folding chairs. When I came back half an hour later as he suggested, it turned out that it had been Joe McPhee.

Pollock's mysterious prose spoke of an alternate version of our world in which shamanism and magic coexisted alongside technology. McPhee performed interludes on soprano saxophone and Casio Digital Horn between texts, and after an intermission, he performed a duo set with David Gamper, who played various wind and percussion instruments and electronics. McPhee utilised a collection of guitar stomp boxes on his winds which he referred to as his "MESS" (Miniaturised Electronic Support System). There was humour, virtuosity and beautiful lyricism in his performance.

I only met Oliveros herself briefly one time, at the Wave Farm Audio Buffet in Acra, New York. In 2015, she and her partner IONE donated a mixing board to Wave Farm, which they use for an annual live collaborative broadcast. That year I participated and played the Celtic harp with a contact pickup, while Helen Rush processed the harp through some pedals. Sound engineer Jen Kutler was tasked with coordinating 30 or so participants, some with acoustic instruments, some with electronics. The process resembled herding cats. We were all audio elements floating around in a soundscape soup, live mixed to the airwaves.

As for my listening, I don't know if it qualifies as particularly deep. I'm still working at it. But I've been writing these vocal rounds lately. The texts are meant to be a little funny, but they have a strange way of ringing true: *"Listen/Shut up and listen/Shut up and listen/ Just try and fucking listen".* ○

PG Six's *Parlor Tricks And Porch Favorites* is reissued by Amish. A new album will be released this year by Drag City

Courtesy PG Six

HELEEN VAN HAEGENBORGH
Squaring The Circle

Squaring the Circle, a piece for 4 percussionists & electronics, is a musical answer to Pi, a key work by artist Johan de Wilde and part of the S.M.A.K. Museum collection. Van Haegenborgh manipulates Pi by using the sequence of numbers, at times for the rhythmic organization to create chaos and a sense of unpredictability; freedom naturally arises. Visually there is a link with the vertical aspect of De Wilde's work through the choice of a set of tubular bells per player and with a link with the title through the large number of round instruments on stage such as 2 timpani, 2 bass drums, 8 gongs, cymbals etc.. The challenge was to shape the idea of fighting squares and circles.

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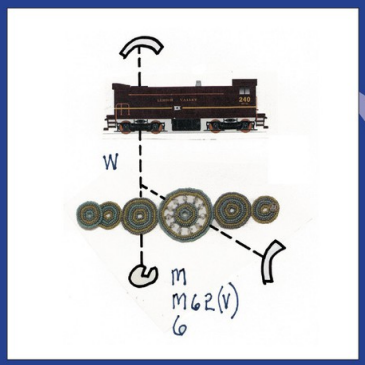

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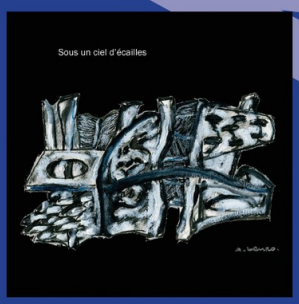

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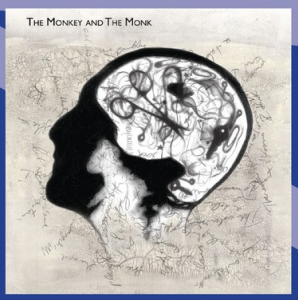

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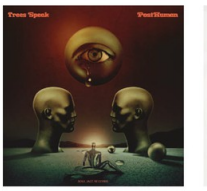

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